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LITERARY WORKERS

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OR

Pilgrims to the Temple of Honour

BY

JOHN GEORGE HARGREAVES, M.A.

AUTHOR OF 'POSSIBILITIES OF CREATION; OR, WHAT THE WORLD MIGHT HAVE BEEN,' 'BLUNDERS OF VICE AND FOLLY,' ETC. ETC.

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TO

The Warden, Masters, and Scholars

OF

DURHAM UNIVERSITY.

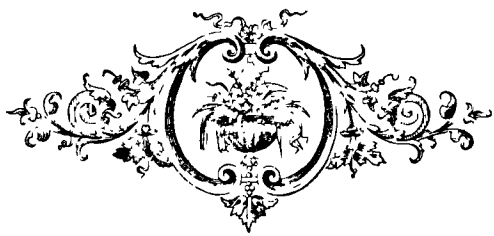
PREFACE.

ITTLE apology, it is hoped, is needed for a work of this description. The subject will ever be fresh and fascinating. If there is something to interest us in the story of the humblest of our fellow-creatures, how much more in the lives of the most highly gifted?

There are various productions bearing more or less, upon the same topic, and notably amongst these stands the elder Disraeli's sketch of the Literary Character, to which the writer is largely indebted. It is not in any spirit of rivalry that he adds another to the list; but in the belief that the intrinsic charm of the theme will float this and many other volumes of the kind.

The book is intended more especially for literary aspirants, and its purpose will be answered if it affords any genial stimulus to readers who may wish to rank amongst the toilers with the Pen.

The author has endeavoured to invest literary genius with something of a personal character by tracing its story (cursorily, of course) in the form of a biography from the cradle to the grave.



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CHAPTER I.

THE CRADLE OF GENIUS.

To be born is, of course, the first point in the life of a genius. It is a way we have in this world, whatever may be the fashion elsewhere; and with this good old practice, the most gifted, as well as the most stupid, must fain comply. But when, where, and of whom, are questions which must have a special interest in the case of celebrated individuals. Was it at the right time, in the right place, and under the right conditions?

For every man, however humble, there is probably some particular niche in the community, some work which he could admirably perform if we could only ascertain the precise purpose he was intended to fulfil. Occasionally, as we all know, and sometimes painfully experience, people seem to get fearfully misplaced. Round men are often found in square holes, and square men in cylindrical quarters. Dean Swift was hustled by circumstances into the pulpit, where, as he complained, he could only preach pamphlets, when he ought to have been in Parliament; and we can easily conceive what a lustreless career Marlborough might have led had he been born in piping times of peace, with a George Fox for his father and a Hannah Fry for his mother.

In the quaint old days when the heavenly orbs were supposed to interest themselves in sublunary affairs, and indeed to preside over human destinies, the exact moment of a person's

nativity was a point of considerable importance to himself, and indirectly to his fellow-creatures as well. But when a child of genius appears it would be of far more consequence to inquire what literary stars are in the ascendant, and to show what influences, social and intellectual, beneficent or malignant, are likely to affect his development.

Nothing can be more capricious, apparently, than the principle upon which this enviable prerogative is distributed amongst men. The Supernals have a way of their own—*sunt superis sua jura*, as the old heathen said.[1]

Every now and then, as we may figuratively report, there enters this planet a Royal Messenger, with a commission of genius in his hand. Invisible, unfortunately, he is to us; but if we could recognise him in his sun-clad livery, with what curiosity should we follow his footsteps to ascertain at what door he will pause. Upon whose head will he place the unfading wreath of renown? Not at yonder princely mansion does he stop; stately halls and gilded saloons he seems to eschew; even the most fashionable localities are passed without a halt in his step. When he wanted a Shakespeare he went to the house of a wool-comber at Stratford; a Scott, to the office of an attorney at Edinburgh; a Moore, to the shop of a grocer in Dublin. At other times, when sent out with the mantle of poetic inspiration, he found Burns at the plough, Chatterton at a charity school, Hogg attending his sheep on the mountain side, Ben Jonson with a mason's trowel in hand; and John Milton with a schoolmaster's ferule on his desk.

[1] 'Events may be calculated, predicted—Spirits never. No earthly oracle announces the appearance of genius; the unfathomable will of the Creator suddenly calls to it— Be.' This always seems to me to involve one of the strongest proofs of a God, all-present indeed, but personal and conscious.'—*The Worship of Genius*, by Professor C. Ullmann.

Diving down now, however, into some obscure street, let us suppose that he taps at the door of a lowly dwelling, where he discovers the object of his quest slumbering peacefully in its cradle. Bending over the unconscious infant, and breathing gently on its fair white brow, he bestows upon the child those splendid endowments which will make it famous throughout all time. This is the baptism of intellect, which whoever receives should hold himself consecrated to a life of good works and gallant exertion. By the process he is constituted one of nature's peers and priests, and to him, if to any one, should apply the fine old maxim, *noblesse oblige.*

Crowns, as we know, run in families; coronets pass from heir to heir. But the highest distinction we have in this planet—the diadem of genius—is plainly conferred without the slightest regard to blood, or wealth, or position. In many countries trades were, and in some still are, hereditary. Even the executioner's office has been handed down from father to son; and there have been successive Sansons who have lopped off heads, as there have been successive Bourbons who claimed the right of sending those heads to the block. But had the duty of ministering at the high altar of Nature, like the duties of the Jewish priesthood, been confined to any particular class, a despotism of intellect, not necessarily associated with conscience, might have been established, and the world would probably have been very much the worse for the arrangement.

William Godwin and, indeed, greater thinkers than he have expressed an opinion that it might be possible to make genius a transmissible quality. From sire to son, from son to grandchild, could not the divine faculty, under due management, be handed down like a title to an estate? Of course this must be regarded as a mere philosophical vagary. Facts seem to be

completely against it. Pedigree is utterly indifferent to talent. Cicero's son, it is well known, was a half-wit, Addison's only child was little better than an idiot, Milton's daughters inherited none of their parent's talent, and Shakespeare's limited issue never distinguished themselves either in the dramatic way or in any other literary line. It would be in vain to inquire who was the heir of Bacon's intellect; or upon which of his progeny did Goethe's many-coloured mantle light? Were the qualities which gave Cromwell supreme command to be found in his successor Richard; and did not the big brain and master mind of Napoleon shrink into the puniest dimensions in the person of the Duke of Reichstadt? Certainly it is not given to many parents to be at the same time the offspring of one celebrity and the author of another. 'When I was a boy,' said the banker Mendelssohn, 'people used to call me the son, and now they call me the father, of the great Mendelssohn.'

That intellect indeed is not essentially dependent upon what might be called parental constitution, either bodily or mental, is proved by the fact that whilst one member of a family may be an Admirable Crichton, another may be an elaborate dunce. Given a couple, each with six fingers upon their hands, and we might speculate with some little hopefulness upon the birth of a child equally blest in the digital department; but if the greatest masculine genius of the day were to marry the greatest feminine prodigy, it is quite possible but their heir might be little better than a dolt. 'The son of the learned pig, if he had one,' said Sir Walter Scott, writing to his son, 'would be a mere brute to make bacon of.'

Certain it is that no man has yet been able to convert his genius into an heirloom; for even if he succeeded in bequeathing it by will to his child, and the Revenue people were to

allow it to pass without making a charge for duty (an almost nconceivable supposition), it would be pretty sure to vanish before it could reach his grandchild. It has been observed that here is scarcely a single inheritor of the name, and certainly none of the greatness, of any famous British poet whose distinction bore date prior to the middle of the last century. If our House of Lords must necessarily be composed of men of genius, could the peerage be granted otherwise than for life merely? Mr. Galton might tell us what the average stature of children would probably be, if that of their parents were known; but it is to be feared that he could give no reliable indication of their mental endowments, even if the father were a Socrates, and the mother an Aspasia or a Madame de Staël. Upon this point indeed, what can be more significant than the fact that from the same couple may spring a genius and a dolt; for who has not met with families where one brother or sister seems to have appropriated, scandalously one might say if it were intentionally, nearly all the brains of the rest?

Still, in these days of Darwinism, it would be well to try whether something might not be made of the hereditary hypothesis. In China the descendants of Confucius are exempt from imperial taxation. Would it not be a pleasing experiment, if our Government were to offer a similar privilege to any family which would engage or contrive to produce one genius in each successive generation for a few centuries to come? No greater temptation, it is presumed, could be offered to a genuine Briton than freedom from the visits of the tax-gatherers. Would it not be a proud position for any man to occupy in the Empire if he and his posterity alone, amongst their sorely burdened brethren, could snap their fingers at those grim functionaries, and even speak without emotion, still less dismay, of the

Chancellor of the Exchequer, and his demands upon the National pocket?

At the same time the experiment, if successful, would be a splendid testimony to the doctrine of Evolution. In fact, some such hereditary move may be said to constitute a needful item in the great drama of development. For it is impossible to suppose that after running through millions of previous stages, Nature reached the last when the anthropoid ape graduated into Man. The sheer momentum of the theory, if we may so speak, must carry it on through countless succeeding dispensations; indeed the power of evolution ought to augment rapidly as the intelligence of each successive product improves. The human animal being therefore on its way to some superior organisation in which mind must necessarily assume a corresponding elevation, it seems not only pardonable but compulsory to infer that something like genius will become the universal instead of the occasional endowment of the race. Should not the Darwinians therefore lay this question seriously to heart? On the one hand, the point seems vital to the credit of their theory: on the other, the glory of assisting Nature in her operations, and contributing to the next grand product of development should put them on their mettle; for this must undoubtedly be the greatest advance ever yet effected in our planet.

Since, then, the highest of all secular gifts is conferred upon men with so little respect of person or position, the fortunate receiver need not trouble himself if he does not find a single drop of *azul sangre*—the blue blood of the aristocracy—running in his veins. Let him be as obscure as he may in his genealogy, he holds his patent of precedence direct from the true fountain of honour. Bishop Warburton once observed in the House of Lords, more caustically perhaps than correctly, that he never

knew a person boast of rank 'who had anything else to boast of.' At a certain banquet, indeed, the brilliant Sheridan indulged in a vaunt that he was descended from the loins of sovereigns, upon which Dr. Spry whispered to a neighbour, 'Quite true; the last time I saw his father he was performing the King of Denmark.' But it is more than probable that Brinsley was half intoxicated when he laid claim to royal descent.

Very different was it with Samuel Johnson, when that worthy paid his attentions to his future wife—an occasion on which a man generally puts his best foot foremost, or, at any rate, keeps his worst one in the shade. He told her frankly that one of his relations had been hanged; to which the lady replied with equal naïveté, and with admirable magnanimity, that though none of her connections, to her knowledge, had attained that painful distinction, she had twenty who merited it. But might not pretty much the same be said of numerous unsuspecting families? The difference, said a 'celebrated man,' quoted by Archbishop Whately, between a person with 'a long line of noble ancestors and an upstart, is, that the one knows for certain what the other only conjectures as highly probable, that several of his forefathers deserved hanging.'

In after-life it is true, when praised by the public and petted by titled dowagers, a successful writer may possibly resent his humble origin, and feel himself aggrieved by his parentage. Not very respectful may be his feelings towards his sire, if living, or his veneration for his mother, if dead. He may take the fifth commandment with considerable qualification. The Poet Mark Akenside, the son of a butcher, was condemned to a perpetual limp because a cleaver, falling on his foot whilst a child, had maimed him for life. To him, and, as he perversely concluded, to others, the defect was a standing advertisement of

the profession to which the family belonged. It was therefore an unpardonable event, which all the Pleasures of Imagination and all the honours derived from his great poem could not completely efface.

But apart from mere social distinctions, is it not a pleasant possibility that any household may turn out a genius? What mother can say that the child whose cradle she is rocking will not take his place in the peerage of Intellect, or become one of the Lords of Literature? What father is there who may not indulge the bright dream that his name may be ennobled by the lisping lad whose eagerness for knowledge, and whose passion for dissecting every toy he receives, indicate a mind of a particularly inquisitive and possibly philosophical turn? Can he refrain from fancying that to be the author of an author implies that he has in some mystic way or other endowed the latter with intellect as well as with flesh and blood?

It is very true that an honest speculator upon destiny is bound to remember that the infant's lot may be precisely the reverse. Yonder boy may prove to be a clever rogue, a dashing adventurer, or a brilliant profligate. Nay, innocent as he now looks, it may be his fate to close his days at Dartmoor Prison, or to part from the sun on the treacherous floor of the scaffold. 'Mirabeau's head,' observed Chateaubriand, 'was moulded either for a throne or a gallows.' Nobody could say for which at first. He came close to the former when he ruled the people by his eloquence, and was looked up to by his sovereign as the bulwark of the monarchy; he came near to the latter, when he had appropriated, as his brother remarked, every vice under the sun, 'except one which he dared not practise;' and certainly, had he lived a little longer, he would have proved one of the most prominent victims of the guillotine.

'Tom will one day be hanged,' said Gainsborough's father, when he found that the lad had attached his signature, imitated with wonderful accuracy, to a request for a holiday. It was a case of glaring forgery, and he saw that it might easily be followed up by more serious pranks which the law, and possibly the executioner, might be called upon to cure. When, however, the angry parent was shown some of the boy's sketches, in which he had copied nature with equal fidelity, but with much less criminality, he gleefully exclaimed, 'Tom will one day be a genius.' Nor was the prediction falsified, for the young rascal proved to be, as Reynolds remarked, one of Nature's most faithful, if not most poetical, portrayers.

But how shall parents know whether their infant offspring belongs to the aristocracy of intellect? Bees of good augury don't come now to settle upon cradled lips as they once did, or are reported to have done (pretty much the same thing), in the days of Plato, Pindar, and other classical worthies. The Delphic oracle was consulted by the parents of Euripides in anticipation of his birth. The answer was particularly gracious. Apollo assured Mnesarchus that he should have a son whom Greece would honour, and upon whose head the victor's crown would certainly be placed. There was some ambiguity, it is true, in this august intimation (inseparable, it would seem, from the Pythian revelations), for the delighted father proceeded to train the boy's muscles, under the impression that athletic success at the Olympic games was implied; whereas, as every one knows, it is the produce of his mind alone which has given him scholastic immortality.

Nature occasionally offers some hints in the size of the head, the breadth of the brow, the character of the features. But these admit of such qualifications that it is by no means easy to

say honestly how they should be interpreted. Bulk of person is certainly no criterion ; for if it were, what would have become of Newton, who, as we are informed, was so diminutive that he might have been stowed away in a 'quart mug,' or of Archbishop Whately, who soon after his birth was weighed against a miserable turkey and found decidedly wanting? Scores indeed of our celebrated men would infallibly have been tumbled into the cavern at Mount Taygetus in their infancy had they been born in Sparta.

It might be very convenient if mothers had prophetic intimations of a nascent genius (provided such intimations were reliable) like Sir Thomas More's, who saw all her children file before her in a dream, one of them having a countenance which shone with a brilliancy far surpassing the rest. Speaking generally, it would scarcely be safe to accept maternal testimony on such a point ; but some little faith may be accorded to this vision, for the simple reason that one child only was selected for distinction, whereas some parents have been known to 'try it on' with Nature, by assuming, until palpably contradicted by facts, that most of their ducklings were swans.

Nor could a paternal certificate of coming greatness always be accredited with as much confidence as it was in the case of the elder Ampère, who wrote to his wife the day before his head fell under the knife of the guillotine, 'there is nothing which I don't expect from our son.'

Jeremy Bentham's father was determined that his boy should take rank as a prodigy. Every act or utterance which could be construed into an expression of talent was accordingly carried to his credit with Nature ; and if the fond parent could have had his own way he would have debited the world with the greatest genius of modern times. There was much in the youth, it is

true; but it can scarcely be said, spite of the adulation he ultimately received, that Jeremy occupies a particularly conspicuous position in the British Valhalla.

But least of all would it answer to accept a boy's own testimony to his merits as soon as he could deliver an opinion upon the point; otherwise, would not all the places of honour be speedily filled by mediocrities, if not by positive nonentities? So fully was St. Simon (the Socialist) impressed, whilst a youth, with a conviction of his importance in the scheme of creation, that he had himself roused every morning by the summons, 'Awake, M. le Comte, you have great things to do.' An excellent *réveil* this would be for us all, if we could only take it modestly, and proceed to dress with a full sense of our responsibility, and a determination to do our duty both to Heaven and Earth; but in many cases, it is to be feared, the only effect would be to send the sleeper to rest again, under the firm persuasion that when he did rise he could do in ten minutes what another could not accomplish in less than a day.

But wanting or distrusting mere physical indications of genius in a great measure, we must resort to mental tests. Amongst the earliest suggestions of a superior intellect, a passionate love of reading may generally be noted. Not, be it observed, a mere liking for childish literature, for works crowded with illustrations, and specially with gaudy pictures of giants or impossible fairies, or even of very mundane pirates and free-booters. This kind of appetite is almost as much a matter of ordinary juvenile experience as the measles or chicken-pox. Some children look upon a book as a girl does upon a doll, or a boy upon a peg-top—they are matters of mere passing amusement. The poet Shenstone, when a very small urchin, always expected his mother to bring him a volume of some kind or other, when

she went to market; but failing to do so on some occasions, the good creature, with more cunning than candour, covered a piece of wood with cloth, so as to resemble a book as much as possible, and presented it to the lad on his retiring to rest. The little dupe, it is said, went contentedly to bed with the treacherous treasure under his pillow. Of course it is the use which a boy makes of his reading, and the stimulus it exerts on the brain, that render it valuable as a test of character, or a revealer of capacity. There may be no merit in devouring a whole library, if it means the simple gratification of curiosity, or the indulgence of an indolent mind in dreams of unreality. But where a genuine passion for knowledge exists, there can be few more rapturous sensations than those of a young soul, when ushered into a new world, either of facts or of fancies. And, perhaps, there is no circumstance more expressive on the one hand, of the benevolence which has been lavished in the constitution of the intellect, nor, on the other, of the destiny which that intellect was created to fulfil; for, however homely may be the material on which the mind fastens, its ardour seems to attest its immortality. For souls like these, books are the true sorcerers. There is magic distilled from every page; there is witchery in almost every word. Dead men are called up from their graves to tell their own tales; the past comes and goes, as if it were a willing slave to the present; the chambers of science seem to be unlocked, and the eye catches a glimpse of their many marvels; the mind wanders along the highways of History, and hastens to see Rome built, or Troy burnt; or, entering the realm of pure Fiction, it disports itself in ecstasy amidst the strange shapes and the shining phantoms with which that airy region is peopled.

Niebuhr, the historian, when a child, read with a sense of reality which seems to have been overpowering. The war with

Turkey, in the year 1787, excited his mind so vividly, that in his very dreams he fancied he was poring over the gazettes, and actually repeated the intelligence aloud in his sleep. Nay, those nightly talks included anticipations, which were so frequently realised, that they might have almost been regarded as approaches to prophecy. So, when studying the ancient authors, he launched himself into their life as fully as if it were his own, and became for the occasion a naturalised denizen of the old classical world. At such times he was as much a Greek as Xenophon or Herodotus; as much a Roman as Tacitus or Livy; and the tragic poets threw him into such a tempest of emotion that he could not bear to read more than a few pages at a spell.

When, therefore, a parent sees a child eschewing the ordinary sports of his age, and voluntarily leaving the playground, to enjoy a solitary ramble in the woods; or when he finds the lad perched in a tree, where he sits reading, strapped to the branches, as was the case with young Herder, by the hour together; or when, bounding suddenly into the boy's chamber at dead of night, he discovers him deep in study by the taper's glimmering light—he may safely inquire whether he has not got a somewhat uncommon kind of creature on his hands. It does not exactly follow that he is the owner of a genius, but he may fairly look upon the love of reading and of musing as possible symptoms of early consecration. In other words, the youth finds a world within himself as well as a world without, and of all employments, the exploration of these purple-lighted realms is to him the most enchanting. Geniuses, says Menzel, do not grow like trees in a forest, but single and solitary. 'I never played,' wrote Coleridge, who could scarcely be said to have passed through a genuine childhood at all, 'except by myself, and then it was

acting over what I had seen or read, or half one and half the other; with a stick cutting down weeds and nettles, as one of the Seven Champions of Christendom.' Before he was eight years old, according to his own statement, he was no longer a boy but a character. When at Christ's Hospital, he might be seen sitting on a door-step, or crouching in a corner, whilst his mates were at play, immersed in some 'grown up' production; for, during his stay at that institution, a generous stranger gave him the run of a circulating library, to which he did unlimited justice; for, said he, 'I read through the catalogue, folios and all, whether I understood them or did not understand them.'

Harriet Martineau, when a girl of seven years, was left at home one Sunday afternoon, and found upon the table an untempting volume in appearance, which, however, she took in hand, and began to read, attracted by the word 'Satan.' It was *Paradise Lost.* She became deeply interested in the adventures of the fallen archangel. From that period up to the age of fourteen, she lived, as she said, 'in heart, mind, and soul, in Milton.' The songster of chaos, the historian of heaven's wars, had set the whole universe in motion for her. Sightless himself he had awakened in her an inexpressible longing, 'the secrets of the abyss to espy.' Her thirst for knowledge became unbounded. She had always a book in her pocket when walking, or a book in her lap whilst seated at meals; and even when engaged in sewing she had some favourite poem at hand from which she took eager but stealthy draughts.

And who is that youth with the angel face, who is reading his way through the crowded streets of London, jostling the passengers, and coming into collision with lamp-posts, but too earnestly occupied with the Greek play he is perusing, to care what damage he does either to himself or others? That is

Percy Bysshe Shelley, who pushed his wild way through the world pretty much upon the same principle—being so self-absorbed, that it mattered little what mischief he did by his doctrines or example, provided he gave full play to the impetuous emotions which raged within him.

When Fichte was a boy of seven his father bought him the renowned adventures of Siegfried. The book opened out a realm of enchantment to the lad. Into this he flung himself so enthusiastically that he neglected his duties, and brought down punishment on his head. The chastisement affected him so severely that, in a spirit of contrition, he walked to the stream which ran hard by their habitation, and cast the dear but dangerous volume into the waters. Scarcely done, ere regretted. The child's heroism gave way when he saw his treasure launched and lost. Whilst weeping bitterly his father came up, and was naturally exasperated on learning that Johann had flung his gift in the stream. Thereupon he doubled the boy's woes by inflicting a supplemental castigation; and when some time afterwards, on discovering the true motive, he presented his son with another work of the same alluring class, the youth begged permission to decline it, for fear he should again be led into temptation.

CHAPTER II.[1]

EARLY MANIFESTATIONS.

LOOK at the matter as we may, it is difficult to resist the conviction that genius—marked and unmistakable genius—is an original, and not an acquired faculty. It is a special gift, with a special aim. Lavater says 'that he who in the same given time can produce more than others has energy; who can produce more and better, has talent; who can produce what others cannot, has genius.' In such cases the mind being created with certain aptitudes and affinities, there must be an inborn impulse, or at least a native inclination to some particular pursuit; and whatever adroitness that mind might display, if applied to other purposes, it can never work with the same efficiency as when its energies are exerted through Nature's chosen channels.

Reverting, then, to our imaginary Genius, the child to whom the Royal Messenger has delivered the mantle of Inspiration, the next great question will be, what kind of a worker will this favoured one prove, and in what direction do the Supernals call upon him to labour?

[1] With a view to abridge this work, a chapter has been omitted on the much debated subject, 'What is Genius?' The many theories which have been propounded on the point constitute an interesting study—ranging as they do from the assumption that nothing more is implied than an 'infinite capacity for taking pains' up to Fichte's view that it is a divine idea or faculty implanted in the mind, or to the more grotesque notion that it is the result of cultivation in a prenatal state of existence—Pascal, for instance, having been well schooled in geometry in his previous life, and therefore enabled as a child to work his way through a portion of Euclid before he had ever seen the work or heard the name of the philosopher of Megara.

It is almost a pity that souls don't come into the world ticketed for their particular *rôle* in creation. But, happily, in some cases Nature speaks out so promptly and peremptorily in the form of a ruling passion, that there can be little room for doubt. In the more objective arts or pursuits she can intimate her wishes in a way which the dullest need not misinterpret. One of her pupils, for instance, she endows with an ear for sweet sounds and glorious harmonies, and tells him to become a Handel or a Haydn. It was no task for Mozart to predict the fame of Beethoven when the latter performed some musical exercise which had been prescribed by the great maestro; 'Listen to that youth,' said he to the bystanders; 'he will some day make a noise in the world.' 'That lad plays the piano like the devil,' observed Zelter to Goethe on hearing Felix Mendelssohn finger the keys—doubtless assuming that this was a high compliment to the youthful genius as well as a civil thing to say of Satan. Nor could there be any question regarding Mozart's own commission in this world, when, quite a child, he appeared at the court of Vienna, and played with such masterly skill upon the organ and harpsichord that he enchanted all listeners; the Emperor dubbing him the 'Little Magician,' and the Empress taking him upon her knee and kissing him with admiration.[1]

So the good Mother of us all puts a pencil into the hand of another of her children, and bids him become a great artist. There could be no question as to the boy George Morland, when, amongst other freaks of artistic genius, he drew the figure of a

[1] By way of contrast take the following incident: 'What do you think of Beethoven?' asked Habeneck of Kreutzer. 'In what respect?' rejoined the other. 'Why, as a composer,' said Habeneck. 'Oh, a poor fool who will never do anything worth deserving.'—Engel's *Musical Celebrities*, vol. i. p. 10.

crayon lying carelessly on the floor, and this with such skill that his father stooped to pick it up, as a reality, to the infinite amusement of the little chuckling deceiver.

To a third, Nature gives an eye, with a mind behind it, for fine forms and graceful attitudes, imparting at the same time the requisite power to embody these in lasting marble, and telling him to do his duty amongst men as a Canova or a Chantrey.

Another, again, she inspires with an irrepressible passion for animal life, from a golden eagle or a giraffe down to a bee or a butterfly. Thomas Edward, the Scotch naturalist, sprang out of his mother's arms, when a child of four months only, in the attempt to seize some flies which were buzzing at the window, and would have suffered a severe fall, had she not fortunately clutched his clothes before he reached the ground. As soon as he could use his little legs, he made the acquaintance of all the dogs, cats, ducks, geese, and poultry resident in his neighbourhood. He was on intimate terms with every pig which was accessible. There was a vicious sow, in particular, which seems to have exercised a peculiar fascination over him, for he was continually gazing at the brute through the palings of her stye, and being missed one night when little more than a year old, it was found, after a search in all directions, including a Gipsy encampment, that he had spent the whole night with the fierce animal and her unclean brood. Even when—matured and married—he was engaged in shoemaking from six in the morning until nine in the evening, that man would sally out after supper—sometimes indeed without the meal—and ramble over silent moors, and through the moonlit forests, in search of moths or beetles, of birds and beasts, of plants and shrubs; for whatever crawled, or flew, or swam, or breathed, or grew in

nature's pastures, had unspeakable charms for Thomas Edward. Similarly, Frank Buckland began to collect specimens of animals at the early age of four, and even at the precocious era of two and a half he could, as his mother reported, have gone through all the books in the Radcliffe Library without miscalling any of the creatures represented. So quaintly did his passion, as a naturalist, display itself, in subsequent days, that he was in the habit of cooking and eating the flesh of various animals, in order to ascertain how they tasted, and whether they might not be adopted as human food. When a panther in the Zoological Gardens died, and was buried before he could bespeak a slice or two of the creature, he had the carcase exhumed, and tried a chop, which, however, he found to be far beneath venison in savoury worth. Many a disgusting dish did this genial enthusiast essay, and many a loathsome tribute did he pay in the shape of nausea and indigestion to the science which he pursued with such devotion.

In like manner, if a youth is destined to become great as an author, it is very probable that he will indicate his bias by filling copy books and quires of paper with his lucubrations. Amongst these it is almost certain there will be a tragedy, an ambitious ode, and the commencement of a grand epic. Within the space of three years, whilst at a preparatory school in Paris, Victor Hugo (says a writer) produced, during his holiday hours, a 'collection of verses, comprising odes, imitations of Ossian, translations from Virgil, Horace, Martial, and other Latin writers, romances and fables, epigrams, madrigals, charades in rhyme, impromptus, a comic opera, an epic of 500 lines called *The Deluge*, etc.'

Hartley Coleridge, when a boy, wrote a tragedy which he laid before his father, requesting the latter to assist him in completing

the catastrophe. The philosopher did not address himself to the task with as grave a sense of responsibility as the boy thought the occasion required; whereupon Hartley, with some indignation, declared that he would inform the public 'that the *only bad lines* in the piece were written by Mr. Coleridge senior!'

One of the commonest signs of a literary turn is to start a private periodical. In August 1820, a prospectus appeared stating that the first number of the *Spectator*, to be edited by one Nathaniel Hawthorn, would shortly be issued. The work was to be published on Wednesdays at the price of twelve cents per annum. On the 21st of that month, the opening number, written in characters representing print, burst upon the world; that is to say, it was put into circulation amongst the limited members of an extremely limited circle. There was nothing brilliant in the choice of topics, for they consisted of such subjects as Solitude, Industry, Benevolence, Hope, Courage, and others of an equally inspiring and original description. But there were touches of fun in some of the announcements, as when the author inserted amongst the births the arrival of seven kittens, the mother of which was reported to be in a state of convalescence, or when he apologised for the absence of the usual obituary by stating that no deaths of any importance had taken place in the town. Unfortunately six numbers only were published.

Still it does not by any means follow that Intellect, however lofty, is always disclosed in childhood. Johnson asserted, sportively perhaps, that no boy under seven could have any genius except for peg-top and apple-pie. Nature does not undertake to give us the earliest possible notice of the rising celebrity. So far from promise, still less performance, necessarily dating from the nursery or the school, experience has taught us that whilst youthful forwardness is often a prelude to mature

imbecility, many remarkable individuals have set out on their journey to fame under menacing symptoms of stupidity. Oliver Goldsmith's rustic schoolmistress pronounced him 'one of the dullest boys she had ever in hand'—so much so, indeed, that she considered it 'scarcely possible to make anything out of him.' At school he was regarded as a thorough-paced dunce, and therefore unanimously elected to fill the office of common butt. And yet, as we now gratefully remember, some of the most charming prose and verse in the language eventually issued from a brain which at first seemed almost impenetrable to the alphabet. Gessner, a German poet, once well known to the devout in this country by his *Death of Abel*, and who belonged to a family which had produced several talented men, was so eminent for juvenile dulness that his parents applied to Bodmer, the German Horace, to cure him, if possible, of that disorder. The latter rashly, if benevolently, undertook the operation; but after toiling through a twelvemonth, he abandoned the task in disgust, declaring that writing and arithmetic must constitute the sum of the lad's attainments. Dr. Barrow, as a boy, indicated so little promise, that his father is reported to have expressed a wish, more pious than paternal, 'that if it should please Heaven to take any of his children, he hoped it would be Isaac.' The sacrificial youth, however, lived to be distinguished as a divine and a philosopher, and thus revenged himself nobly upon his resigned parent, whose only chance of escape from oblivion himself rested upon this particular lad.

Numerous other names in our literature, such as those of Sterne, Sheridan, Scott, might be quoted in illustration of this late budding of intellect in many eminent instances. 'The flowers of Genius,' it is said, 'open and shut at different hours,' as we know is the wont of their 'silken sisters of the field.'

Even in cases where a man's personality enters largely into the reckoning, there may be no sign of future superiority—scarcely, indeed, of commonplace efficiency. Luttrell, when speculating upon the fortunes of the young men he met at the Castle at Dublin, remarked to himself, as he gazed upon the impassible face of one youthful captain, 'Let who will get on in this world, you certainly will not.' The individual in question was no other than the then unproclaimed hero who subsequently beat the most brilliant commander of the age, and who wrote a large part of the history of Europe for his generation, with the swords of his soldiers, instead of leaving it to record by the steel pens of the historians.

On the whole, however, it is not improbable that power of a high description will develop itself at an early period. Some young poets are said to have lisped in numbers because the numbers came. Prior, for example, observes of himself, 'I remember nothing further back in life than that I made verses.' Pope, who wrote his pastorals at a very youthful age, tells us that even before that period, he had composed an epic poem called *Alcander*, from which he concluded that he was the greatest genius that ever lived. Goldoni, whom the Italians regard as the cleverest of their dramatists, wrote a comedy when he was eight years of age; and Kotzebue, who was almost equally prominent as a feeder of the stage in Germany, and whom an English critic has hastily described as the greatest dramatic genius evolved in Europe since Shakespeare produced his earliest comedy somewhere about the same age. Dr. Chalmers expressed his resolution to become a minister almost as soon as he could express any purpose at all; whilst quite a child, he was found preaching on a high chair to a congregation consisting of a single auditor, and, when a student of nineteen,

his prayers at the Hall of St. Andrews were so striking, that people of no heavenly bent flocked to the place to hear him with interest and admiration.

Whilst Lamartine was quite a child, a curé came to visit his parents, and when the day was somewhat advanced, the reverend guest prepared to take his departure, as he had a sermon to compose that evening. Much regret being expressed by the hosts, young Alphonse coolly intimated that if the holy man would remain all night, he, the boy, would write the discourse for him that same evening. True to his word, the volunteer divine appeared before supper with a sermon which surprised the priest as well as the family by its marvellous ability. The visitor indeed could not help suspecting that it was a prankish plagiarism; but Alphonse promptly met this suspicion by offering to improvise a discourse on any subject the worthy father might please to mention.

It must have been a striking scene at the Hôtel Rambouillet, when, one evening, a humble lad from the country, whose name was unknown to the courtly personages and dainty dilettanti who thronged those famous salons, was brought forward to deliver an extemporaneous discourse upon a text to be selected by the company. Very striking, too, to observe how the brilliant audience, surprised to find itself committed to a sermon under such incongruous conditions, speedily yielded to the spell of the young preacher's enthusiasm, and listened in rapt silence to his glowing images and fervent oratory. Nor was it less worthy of note to remark how, when the stream of eloquence ceased to flow, the hushed audience, released from their thrall, rose and gathered round the youthful divine to load him with their thanks and congratulations. This plebeian youth became the famous Bossuet, and was ranked by King and courtiers as the prince of preachers in France.

CHAPTER III.

IN TRAINING.

BUT genius, however early or late in its development, must be specially educated for the part it has to play. Whatever may be said respecting the merits of the usual scholastic curriculum, every individual with a marked intellectuality requires a training in harmony with his peculiar bent, and if he cannot obtain this from others, he must, some way or other, provide it for himself. A drastic course of mathematics would obviously be of very little service, except in the way of discipline, to an ethereal poet or a vivid romancer; whilst a destined master in music or painting would scarcely take the right road to success were he to spend years over verbs, or his whole youth in becoming a walking polyglot. To diet a young poet, whose imagination is the prominent faculty, on dry facts or exact science, or metaphysical subtleties, or the laws of political economy; to engage him in philological pursuits, or treat him as if he were intended to become a great geometer or mechanician, would be singularly perverse. However useful such studies may be in themselves—and there is a use for every kind of knowledge in this world (if not in the next)—they do not constitute the material with which he has to work, nor could they qualify him for the office he has to fill.

Our formal systems of education are, of course, applied indifferently to pupils of every grade of mind and every turn of

talent. The same process is adopted in dealing with souls of the most diversified order. Is not this very much as if a gardener were to collect all manner of herbs and plants, whether tropical, temperate, or arctic, in the same ground, under the assumption that one soil, one climate, and one course of husbandry would be acceptable to each, and that they would all flourish alike under his impartial management?

To a certain extent this promiscuous treatment is inevitable. Years must necessarily be passed in all cases in mastering the elementary 'R's,' and the various rudiments of civilisation.

But that can only be called education in a limited and conventional sense which leaves untouched the special faculty the Almighty has bestowed, and therefore leaves it untutored for the peculiar work it has to perform. Should not one great purpose of the instructor be to discover the particular aptitude of mind in each individual, and to provide, or at any rate to prescribe, the special nutriment it requires? Would it not be well if all educators would regard themselves as sworn triers and scrutineers of intellect? Since genius, as well as decided talent, mean the possession of some definite bias, it ought not to be impossible to detect the Heaven-bestowed faculty, if any systematic investigation of the mind could be adopted.

In his youth, Thomas Aquinas was known amongst his companions as the 'Dumb Ox.' So silent and unreceptive was he, that it seemed as if he would never make any solid advance in knowledge, still less become a light among the learned. But one day his master, entering into discussion with him, was so surprised at his replies and posed by his arguments, that he generously—if somewhat inelegantly—prophesied that the 'Dumb Ox' 'would yet bellow loud enough for the whole world to hear him!' The stripling indeed lived to become one

of the greatest authorities of the Church in the Middle Ages under the title of the Angelic Doctor, and when he died he left seventeen folio volumes, which were regarded by many generations of disciples as a mine of divinity and a treasure-house of scholastic philosophy. For want of this insight into character indeed, 'many a clever boy,' said a great authority, 'has been flogged into a dunce.'

If phrenology could be depended upon as a safe and settled science, what a boon it would be to mankind in determining the bent of a lad's brains! In that case, it would be a wise step to engage a number of professors with their callipers to examine every youth's bumps, and report upon their craniology for the guidance of their parents and tutors.

But it seems vain to expect to found an order of assayers of intellect, and therefore Genius must ever grope its own way to the light. Fortunately, to a certain extent, it is ever its own instructor.

'The best part of every man's education,' affirms Sir Walter Scott, 'is what he gives himself.' 'What I am,' said Sir Humphry Davy proudly, yet honestly, 'I made myself.' From the same original source, as Locke observes, 'Sir Isaac Newton learnt his mathematics.' 'Some minds,' says W. Irving, 'seem almost to create themselves, springing up under every disadvantage, and working their solitary but irresistible way through a thousand obstacles.' So far as their fellow-creatures are concerned, they are self-produced. No school could have taught Shakespeare his poetry, and no collection of tutors could have given Bacon his philosophy. The college in which such souls receive their chief training is open to all comers, for it is the wide university of Nature and of Life. To this the poet especially repairs. If brought into early contact with the tuneful spirit of

creation, he cannot well escape his melodious fate. He will be moved into song by sunsets, tempests, harvestings, the glitter of the skies, and a thousand other factors of beauty and of emotion.

> We are what suns and winds and waters make us ;
> The mountains are our sponsors, and the rills
> Fashion and win their nurslings with their smiles.

Or if backward in his studies there comes a time—the love fit—when even the most prosaic suitor finds himself bound in honour to forge a sonnet to his mistress's eyebrows, or to dilate upon his sufferings in a succession of agonised verses. Sent to an Academy, where lessons in versification were given every hour, a man might never rise above the rank of a mechanical composer; whereas, if poetically inclined, a few walks in the woods, or a little talk with the babbling streams, or a sojourn amongst the lordly mountains, or a midnight colloquy with the stately stars, may draw out the soul's secret powers, and speedily educate it into harmony with the universe. To some minds, indeed, all Nature may seem to be set to music or to song. Mendelssohn having visited Scotland in 1829, his sisters asked him to tell them about the Hebrides. 'It cannot be told,' said he; 'it can only be played.' Down he sat to the piano, and 'improvised the beautiful theme which he afterwards expanded into the "Overture to Fingal's Cave."' To him the Picturesque resolved itself into sweet sounds for the ear, and unspeakable thoughts and emotions for the mind. 'Give me,' said Rameau, the French composer, 'but a Dutch Gazette'—one of the last things one might suppose out of which harmony could be distilled—'and I will set it to music.'

And as with the poet or musician, so with the painter. No one has any doubt in what school Turner learned his cloud-lore,

and made himself master of silvery mists and flaming sunsets. As little can we question that Hogarth, who never enjoyed an academical training for his profession—who indeed, as one of his contemporaries remarked, 'wished to draw well without learning how to draw at all'—put himself apprentice to Nature and Life in order to store his mind with a wonderful collection of forms. He determined to acquire what he called a technical memory of figures and objects. By combining these in his own mind, he would then be able to produce abundant subjects for his pencil. But to accomplish this purpose required keen as well as continual observation. Occasionally he would help himself by jotting down on his thumb-nail some quaint face or some eccentric incident which struck him as worthy of pictorial report. Thus, spite of all the drawbacks under which he laboured as a youth, he scored what he considered one great advantage over his competitors, namely the habit of retaining in his mind's-eye whatever he intended to imitate or reproduce. Who can think without curiosity upon the amazing number of quaint and comic impressions which must have been deposited on that man's retina one after another in endless variety? But, indeed, is not every human eye, with its little recording tissue in the rear, a matchless marvel, seeing that picture upon picture, and spectacle upon spectacle, and portrait upon portrait are piled up in the brain, and this with such small confusion that the owner can draw out, as it were, at a moment's notice, scenes and faces which might have been imprinted there fifty years ago, and keep them before his attention as long and as vividly as he lists?

Might we not say, too, that each princely mind is charged with a peculiar kind of magnetism which enables it to select from the vast store of facts and ideas with which the world is crowded all such as are in keeping with its special aim? Almost

insensibly to himself, a huge stock of material is accumulated. And when the time comes for its use it is discovered that he has been quietly training himself for his duty, and has acquired a splendid capital wherewith to commence work. Great things as well as little things—matters indeed sometimes too trivial for serious study—have been drawn into the brain by a species of silent intellectual attraction. A single sally into the market-place might enable a Dickens to return with material for a novel; a single glance at an old legend or history might furnish a Shakespeare with a Hamlet or a Falstaff for the undying delight of mankind. 'This is master's library,' said a servant at Rydal to a visitor, 'but his study is out of doors.' Creation being a great magazine of facts—thoughts worked out into trees and flowers, rocks and streams, storms and volcanoes, human beings and animals—let men of different orders of intellect concentrate their minds upon the same objects, and see how various will be the results. Bring the poet, for instance, and he will draw out of the landscape, from the grandest cataract down to the humblest primrose, a host of beautiful thoughts, which he arrays after his own fashion, and marshals before us to the sound of musical verse. Bring the man of science, and the complexion of the landscape changes at once; it dissolves, as it were, into a mass of atoms ruled by subtle affinities and animated by mystic laws which work in secret, but with unfailing force and unerring precision. Bring the spiritual seer, and again you have altered all. In the self-same objects he discovers the perpetual manifestations of almighty skill. This mountain was moulded by the Creative Hand; this flower was painted with His pencils of light; this animal was endowed with its inexplicable instincts by a benevolence which studied the wants of every living thing from an angel to a caterpillar. And this drop of water is a sphere into

which He has crowded the living evidences of His skill as prodigally as if it had been a populous and important planet. It is from Nature even more than from books that the children of genius gather the thoughts which throng the brain. It is in solitude that they are employed in distilling philosophy from flowers or pebbles, in listening to the sermons which stones preach or in studying the books which are to be found in the running brooks. The surface of the earth is a great volume which serves as a dictionary of images, or a manual of philosophy, or a museum of phenomena. Then there is the manuscript of the sky in which the Almighty has written in golden cipher the marvels of His power—the firmament from which night after night, for a long series of generations, the placid stars have talked with man, beckoning him from their majestic watch-towers upwards and onwards, as if to herald him on to a serener state of existence.

And there is another object too (the Book of the Heart), which a man must study. It was a beautiful injunction of Sir Philip Sidney's, 'Look in thine own heart and write.' 'There are my poems,' said Robert Nicol, the young Scotch poet; 'I have written my heart in them, and rude, unfinished, and hasty as they are, it may be read there.' It was out of his own heart that Bunyan drew his whole staff of characters; out of his own combats with his conscience that he gathered his knowledge of Satan's wiles, and out of his own spiritual travels that he compiled his famous road-book to the Celestial City.

Nor will reading in its ordinary form fail to contribute largely to a youth's development. Well might John Milton say, in his stately prose, solemn and sounding as the voice of many waters: 'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond

life.' And yet, powerful factors as books are in the education of youth, it must be admitted that a rambling, misdirected course of study must have its dangers and frequently its positive evils.

The Abbé de Lamennais, author of the *Paroles d'un Croyant*, was one of the most restless geniuses France has ever produced. So numerous were his changes in politics and religion, and so extreme were the views he adopted in turn, that he was said at times to be more of a revolutionist than the wildest republican, more of a despot than the most ardent upholder of absolute authority, and more of a papist than the infallible Pontiff himself. It is not surprising, therefore, that a man of this unsettled turn should have been a man of dubious faith. In his boyhood, whilst under the care of an uncle, his wayward habits made it expedient to place him occasionally under domestic restraint. With this view, he was imprisoned for days together in the library, where there was a compartment very bluntly, but not very inaptly, known as *l'Enfer*, seeing that it contained the writings of d'Holbach, Voltaire, Rousseau, and other chief sowers of scepticism. The boy was enjoined to keep aloof from this malodorous region, but, with the perverseness which might have been anticipated, he flew to it at once, and devoured as much of the forbidden fruit as his opportunities allowed. In a short time he was well grounded in infidelity, and though he was doubtless an honest thinker as far as his moral temperament would allow, and in some respects might be said to be a positive believer, he contrived to do the Devil good service in his day by troubling and disordering the faith of France.

The passion for reading, too, may be productive of much mischief if the mind should addict itself unduly to imaginative

literature. Robert Boyle attributed a certain amount of vagabondism in his thoughts to his having read *Amadis of Gaul* and other romances during his recovery from an illness; he therefore sagely endeavoured to cure his volatile fancy by a course of square and cube root, and in this he considered himself tolerably successful. For a philosopher by Nature's appointment such drastic treatment might be profitable; but if the imagination is intensely vivid, it will scarcely consent to be silenced by sums in arithmetic or problems in geometry.

Note also that even the most solid information may be crowded into the brain with little other effect than to convert the receiver into a kind of learned curiosity—nothing more. The metaphysician Hobbes was accustomed to say that, if he had read as much as others, he should have been as stupid too. The power of digestion is as highly necessary for the intellect as it is for that more creaturely organ, the stomach. The difference is aptly expressed by Gibbon, who says that Salmasius, the opponent of Milton, had read as much as Grotius, but the first became a pedant and the second a philosopher. It is precisely one of the qualities of strong genius, however, to select what is congenial from a mass of materials, and to assimilate the really nutritious particles of thought whilst rejecting all the rest.

In like manner, solitary musing may lead to much waste of time and strength, especially in the fascinating process of building castles in the air. The imagination is apt to busy itself in rearing these captivating edifices without much regard to the fact that they must necessarily vanish under the eye of day as surely as Prince Galitzin's palace of ice dissolved under the beams of the sun. Some of these curious creations, however, have been marvels of ingenuity as well as of elaborate credulity. Hartley

Coleridge had his Ejuxria, a great continent with whose geography he became as familiar as that of any habitable portion of the globe. He drew up a chart of this fanciful region. It was occupied by a variety of nations, each having its distinctive character as much as the actual Spaniard or Dutchman; each, too, had its special form of government and religion, and each ran through a separate history, just as if a Tacitus or a Gibbon had undertaken to chronicle its deeds. There were wars and revolutions: generals fought and statesmen intrigued; traitors plotted; monarchs rose and fell; the stage was ever crowded; for figure after figure appeared on the scene, and, after strutting its little hour, vanished like the shadows we call mortal men. So real did this bustling phantasmagoria seem to its creator, that he was apparently 'unconscious of invention;' so literal a turn did he give to his imaginings, that he professed to receive regular despatches from Dream-land, and dealt with them as if he were a Colonial Minister with his four or five thousand a year.

Pretty similar was the experience of Niebuhr, the historian. In his childhood he founded an imaginary kingdom, 'Low England,' which he represented as confidently on a map as if it had enjoyed the benefit of an Ordnance Survey. For this State he enacted laws (not by any means so voluminous as our statutes at large), and occasionally declared wars against invisible foes, winding up the conflict by treaties, which like more mundane compacts were held to be sacred until it was found convenient to break them.

De Quincey and his elder brother had two of these fancy-built empires. The future Opium-Eater was lord of Gombroom, whilst his senior was Sultan of Transnigrosylvania; but unfortunately the masterful spirit of the latter speedily reduced

the former to a state of abject vassalage, and compelled the poor serf to carry on harassing wars and perform tyrannous deeds against which his soul revolted.

Let us not forget, however, that the framers of phantasmal realms like these fly to them frequently as places of refuge from the stern duties of life, and as retreats where they may indulge in an Epicurean indolence which must not be confounded with the nobler reveries of genius. There is no merit in constructing a Paradeisos if it is to be a spot where the owner can simply lounge in the green shady covert, or loll on the soft grass, or doze by the side of the slumbrous stream.

And still less is there anything to say in praise of these extra-mundane regions, if they are to be used as groves and high places, where the owner is to practise the silliest of idolatries—the worship of himself. Yet this is the great danger. What is there to prevent him making himself the chief figure in the scene, and endowing himself with all the merits and virtues that man ever possessed? Is he a warrior in fancy? What battles he fights, what towns he conquers, what unparalleled glories he achieves! Is he a statesman? How senates listen to his wonderful harangues, breathless, lest a word or a tone should be lost; and how the land which may be fortunate enough to call him its ruler rises to a pitch of greatness which Rome never reached, and which even America never expects to attain. But let him be what he likes, in all cases the central object towering above the rest of mankind in intellectual stature is ever himself. Whatever he does in fancy is greater than any one has done before, or will ever do again. In short, the meaning of these withdrawals to the domain of imagination is, in such instances, little more than an act of adoration performed to the praise and glory of the individual himself.

But, in striking contrast to these dreamers, let us take the case of a youth who may be said to have been tutored by machinery. This was John Stuart Mill. A more signal instance of suppressed boyhood could scarcely be quoted. We read of him not as a mortal who ran through the usual vernal stage of existence, but as of one from whose dawning years the spring had been peremptorily excised. His eccentric parent determined to train him as child had never been trained before. It is scarcely a figure of speech to say that he was put to school as soon as he was born, for when consciousness fairly dawned upon him, he found that he was already learning Greek! He could not recollect any period of his existence, however early, in which he had not been studying that language. To him it seemed as if he had been suckled on *Æsop's Fables* in the original tongue. By the time he had reached his eighth year, he had read a large part of Xenophon, Herodotus, Plato, Diogenes Laertius, Lucian, and other famous writers, and had gone through a portentous amount of historical literature, both ancient and modern. By the time he was twelve, he had himself composed Histories of Rome, and of the Roman Government—adding to these a History of Holland, and even a Universal History! At twelve there can be no doubt James Mill had put into the skull of John Stuart Mill more knowledge of a certain kind than would have equipped a score of ordinary school-boys.

To make this knowledge thoroughly available, the parent required his pupil to write out an abstract of all he learnt, and in their walks the time was occupied in little disquisitions on politics, philosophy, and morality, which the boy was expected afterwards to embody on paper, and submit for criticism or correction. The tutor delighted in anomalies. He compelled his child to learn Greek before Latin was attempted. He

supplied him with a lexicon (after the old fashion) in which the meanings were given in the latter language only, thus rendering it necessary that the boy should apply to him for the requisite information. He seems to have purposely rendered the road to learning as rugged as possible, in order to draw out his son's energies, and to equip him as a literary wrestler of the finest skill and of the firmest muscle.

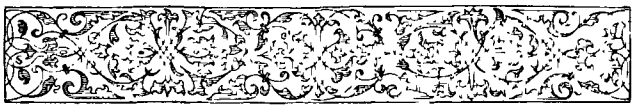
But the unhappiest feature in this strange curriculum was the total exclusion of all the nobler learning of Faith and Devotion, as well as of high humanity. Religion was regarded by the teacher as a worn-out superstition, and even a Deist was, in his opinion, little better than a credulous simpleton. The boy must therefore be brought up a blank-minded atheist. All feeling, all sentiment too, must be carefully avoided. For this purpose poetry was long interdicted, and even in his Greek studies, he was not allowed to handle Homer or the dramatists until some acquaintance with them became absolutely indispensable.

With the best intentions, doubtless, James Mill seems to have totally forgotten the fact that a genuine man possesses a heart as well as a head. He acted as if his object had been to cram the latter to repletion, and to leave the former a hopeless vacuum. Carlyle would have said that his great aim was to bring up his son as a chopper of logic, whose business it was to deal with facts as if they were dead things, and to treat this universe as if it contained nothing but lifeless, soulless matter. The feminine element in our humanity appeared to him to have been totally overlooked, and it is precisely in such a case that we recognise the prodigious force of George Herbert's remark—'A good mother is worth a hundred schoolmasters.' Highly as we may estimate the younger Mill's intelligence, it must be

admitted that, so far as education was concerned, he was a machine-made man. Nature had little to do with his development. He was in some sense an intellectual Frankenstein of his father's creation.

Let it not be forgotten, too, that in the case of earnest genuine labourers, the work of self-education never ends. Michael Angelo, who lived to the gorgeous old age of eighty-nine, was found one day wandering amongst the ruins of the Coliseum, and when questioned as to his motive, replied, 'I go still to school, in order that I may continue to learn.'

And who, indeed, need be ashamed to snatch his satchel, and sally forth, though with feeble feet and waning strength, if he has this fair universe for his academy, and the All-wise One for his Instructor?



CHAPTER IV.

LIONS IN THE PATH.

BUT it frequently happens that the neophyte is placed in circumstances which seem to be utterly adverse to the development of his powers. Nature may call, but he may be unable to reply hopefully, still less confidently.

Schiller's eight years' training at the Duke of Würtemburg's Military School, amidst 400 beings who were all repetitions 'of the same creature, true casts from the same mould, and that a mould which nature solemnly disclaimed,' appeared to be the most unfavourable to which a poet could well be exposed, for 'any disposition to poetry did violence to the laws of the institution, and contradicted the plan of the founder.'[1] Yet happily, as he afterwards acknowledged, the very restrictions and cold-blooded formalities of the place compelled him to seek refuge in the world of ideas, and, instead of extinguishing his passion for the muse, fanned it into a flame.

Very frequently indeed genius has to commence operations by stealth. Its first productions may be treated as crimes. This has been specially the case with poets, though it is only fair to remember that their offence has often consisted in penning stanzas at a time when they ought to have been more prosaically employed.

[1] Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*.

Wieland was forbidden to make rhymes during the day, and therefore rose at an unnatural hour in the morning for the purpose; but he pursued his art with such ardour that he produced a vast amount of forbidden verse, not forgetting the infallible epic, which in his case was on the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Hans C. Andersen describes his sufferings when his master casually learnt that he had written some verses, and audaciously recited them in company as if they were things of worth. With cutting irony, harsher than any corporal infliction, the brainless pedagogue told the boy he would forgive him if one spark of poetry could be found in the composition! Tremblingly the youth brought him the 'Dying Child,' which was perused and pronounced execrable trash! This verdict was accompanied by a burst of anger, and from that day the boy was treated with such cruelty that he nearly sank under it, for it proved, as he said, the 'darkest period of his life.'

There are more formidable people, however, than pedagogues to encounter. What if the obstructor happens to be your own father? Ariosto, like Petrarch, had a long tussle with his sire before he was allowed to follow the course which his instinct prescribed. The father said 'Law,' the son said 'Literature.' For five years the youth was compelled to study jurisprudence, many an angry scene being the result of the strained relationship between the two. These occasions, however, the born poet managed to turn to sly account; for as he was meditating a comedy in which an enraged parent constituted a prominent figure, the wrathful doings of the elder Ariosto supplied the chuckling lad with rich material for his secret production.

It is certainly very unfortunate when one has to fight one's own father. A good son would, of course, much rather that it

should be some other person's progenitor. But it seems to be a little necessity which is occasionally laid upon genius. 'Governors' are at times uncommonly blind and obstinate; and if nature speaks out, and impels a youth forward in the dazzling pursuit of fame, what can the poor fellow do? On the one hand, it seems like treason to Nature to resist the biddings of the power within; on the other, it is painful to snap your fingers at your own sire. It appears very much like a breach of the fifth commandment to rush into poetry if the estimable but self-willed gentleman who gave you breath, who keeps you in pocket-money, and pays your tailor's bills, and from whom you have considerable expectations, should sternly require you to devote yourself to prose. Verily it is a difficult position. Here the calls of genius—there the claims of the Decalogue! Is it not a case upon which the public should take the opinion of some eminent counsel or experienced casuist for the guidance of future disputants?

Benjamin Haydon was destined for the counting-house by his parents, but nature beckoned him from the desk to the easel. From the first his wishes were opposed to the paternal scheme, and a battle royal ensued when he was bound apprentice to business. His purpose to become an artist, however, was unconquerable. His father threatened him with his anger, his mother plied him with her tears, his friends 'baited' him with their entreaties and admonitions. Nor did the lad's resolution falter even when he fell ill, and lost his sight in consequence of inflammation in the eyes. For six weeks he remained quite blind, and it was not until the glitter of a silver spoon awakened some sense of vision that he could hope for a return of the lost faculty. The opposition, of course, availed themselves of the calamity to represent the hopelessness of the course he proposed to pursue. 'Become a painter,' said they, 'why, you can't see!' 'See or

not see,' was the reply, 'a painter I will be; and if I am a great one without seeing, I'll be the first.' Go to London he would, spite of his father and mother, his uncles and aunts, his friends and acquaintances generally. Go he would, even if the devils were as numerous there (and a satirist might say they are) as Luther imagined them to be on the house-tops at Worms.

The greatest difficulty he had to overcome was his mother's remonstrance. That, to his honour, was an obstacle which it cost him much to overleap; for where is there a barrier so slight in appearance, so solid and massive in reality, as a mother's affection? One morning as he lay awake, the door of his chamber was softly opened, and the good woman crept in. She seated herself by his bed, took his hand tenderly, and began to reason with him as to his resolution. What arguments a loving parent would employ may be readily comprehended. The youth listened in tears, but, struggling to be calm, he told her that all attempts to dissuade him would be fruitless. He felt compelled 'by something he could not resist.' He must be a painter. 'Kissing me with wet cheeks and trembling lips, she said, in a broken voice, she didn't blame me; she applauded my resolution, but she could not bear to part with me. I then begged her to tell my father that it was useless to harass me with further opposition. She rose, sobbing as if to break her heart, and slowly left my room borne down with affliction. The instant she was gone, I fell upon my knees and prayed to God to forgive me if I was cruel, but to grant me firmness, purity, and piety, to go in the right way for success.'

And as life began, so it ended! Haydon's existence was one running fight with adversity. His was a perpetual struggle with the Academy or the public; with poverty and neglect; with overstrained ambition and overweening self-esteem; the

tragic story terminating in a despairing quarrel with Fate, and in a brief but terrible encounter with Death.

One of the strangest of perils ever encountered by a boy occurred to Hartley Coleridge. The gloomy anticipations expressed by Southey in regard to his young kinsman at the time he went to college would lead an uninformed reader to imagine that some awful fate was lying in wait for the unfortunate lad. Amidst many dangers arising from the youth's peculiar temperament, it was apprehended that there was one against which it was 'impossible to protect or even caution him.' Let that come, and the consequence would be 'utter and irremediable ruin!' And what was the deadly peril in question? It was no other than his own father—that father being perhaps the most notable man in all England at the time! For it was argued that if that rudderless being, with his weak will and wonderful intellect, should send for the boy to pass the vacations with him, he would doubtless lead the lad into all the depths and mazes of Metaphysics—'would root up from his mind all established principles,' and would throw him out of the 'only profession or way of life for which he was qualified!' And so far did Charles Lamb—no prudish judge under any circumstances—echo this feeling of alarm, that he inquired whether, in the event anticipated, the Lord Chancellor could not be petitioned to rescue him from paternal control?

Rarely perhaps has parental hostility assumed a more offensive form than it did in the case of Charles Young, the much admired tragedian of his day. When he made his *début* at the Haymarket in 1807, in the character of Hamlet, his reception was enthusiastic and his success unquestionable. From one part of the theatre, however, a hiss was frequently heard. There was a determined foe in that quarter. It proved to be his own father.

But if, happily, there is no obstinate parent or cross-grained guardian, or dictatorial patron, or stern legacy-leaving relation to make himself disagreeable and thwart the budding purposes of genius, there may be other lions in the path. There are plenty of these metaphorical beasts, indeed, on the road to the Hill of Honour. Nor are they by any means muzzled. On the contrary, they frequently devour the pilgrims that travel that way, and in the path may often be seen the bones of those who have been slain even before they had made much progress to their goal.

Garrick had to struggle with a refractory elder brother, when he resolved to betake himself to the stage. Peter was a man of buckram soul, and a reverent worshipper of the respectabilities. The idea that one of the family should appear on the boards was inexpressibly galling, although assured by the ablest judges that the neophyte would 'prove not only the best tragedian, but the best comedian in England.' Nothing indeed but David's astounding success could propitiate the offended Peter; but when the *débutant* took the town by storm, when the greatest orator in the country pronounced him the greatest actor, and when the most distinguished poet of the day declared that in this line 'the young man never had his equal, and would never have a rival,' the worthy wine-merchant felt it impossible to continue growling whilst the public—ay, the fashionable public, too—was rapturously applauding.

Or, forgetting the foes which a youth may find in his own household, his environment may happen to be peculiarly unpropitious.

Charles Dickens' apprenticeship to Misery, little suspected by his early contemporaries, was never known to the public at large until revealed by his friend and biographer, Mr. Forster.

The bitter degradation the boy underwent when sent to a blacking manufactory, and employed in pasting labels upon the bottles; and the utter wreck of his high hopes when it appeared that his life might probably have to be passed in mere manual drudgery, produced such a sort of stupor in his soul that he could not even count time correctly, nor could he afterwards tell how long he remained in the house of bondage. His father became a prisoner in the Marshalsea, and when his mother joined him there, the boy had to live apart. 'The never-to-be-forgotten Misery of the old time,' as he subsequently wrote, 'bred a certain shrinking sensitiveness in a certain ill-clad, ill-fed child, that I have found come back in the never-to-be-forgotten Misery of this later time.'

Yet, without doubt, the early associations of that disastrous period, his forced familiarity with the poor and the destitute, with prisoners and captives, with the uncouth workers of the blacking manufactory and the dissolute denizens of the Marshalsea, afforded him a rich store of the peculiar material with which he was specially calculated to deal. Charles Dickens trained and schooled in May Fair or Belgravia—Charles Dickens brought up amongst the puppets of a fashionable drawing-room, would have been a very different and far less celebrated man than the Charles Dickens who was at home (in a literary sense at least) in the parish purlieus with Bumble and Oliver Twist, or in the felon's haunts with Bill Sikes and the Jew Fagin.

But why dwell at length upon the difficulties which beset the candidate for distinction in his youth? Too frequently they turn up at every period of his progress, and pursue him to the very door of the temple, leaving him only when they perceive that he has laid fast hold on the horns of the altar.

CHAPTER V.

THE CALL—OPENING OF THE COMMISSION.

ASSUMING, however, that there are no lions of note to scare the young aspirant, or that he is too stout of heart to be deterred by their roar, it is of the utmost importance that he should learn as soon as possible what is his precise vocation as a worker, and therefore what special path he ought to pursue. The call—the genuine call itself—may at first be obscure. Would that it always happened, as James Russell Lowell genially observes, that 'Nature throws the tools of whatever art she destines a select soul for invitingly in his way. The burnt stick from the hearth must be the pencil, and the wall the canvas for the future painter. Somehow or other, there chances to be a clay-pit, or a pottery, near the birthplace of the young sculptor, and wherever a poet or musician is born there will be an odd volume of Spenser, or a cracked spinnet in the house."[1]

But, as we have seen, the boy, the youth, the man, may sail for a time under sealed orders. The opening of the commission of genius is frequently the result of some casual impulse or some very insignificant event. Michael Faraday was apprenticed to a bookbinder, for whose occupation he had no relish; but it gave him the opportunity of looking into the interior of books, as well as of adorning their exterior. An Encyclopædia being

[1] Lowell's *Conversations on the Old Poets*; Cambridge, U.S.A., 1845, p. 220.

sent to the shop, his attention was riveted by the article on 'Electricity,' and he straightway fell in love with the science in which he, more than any contemporary philosopher, was destined to make such memorable researches.

It was whilst serving as a printer's apprentice that Béranger, the future prince of chansonniers, awoke to a consciousness of his powers. André Chénier, whose writings he was engaged in re-typing, gave the first impetus to his energies, and, after composing some verses of his own, he vowed that he would become a poet. Then, for the first time, he may be said to have heard the voice which dictated the part he was to play in life; for he tells us in his touching little lyric 'Ma Vocation,' that when, helpless and almost hopeless in the world, he asked why God had created such a useless thing, the answer was, 'Sing, little one, sing.' And afterwards during his struggles for bread, when so poor that the expense of the smallest pleasure party forced him to live for eight days afterwards on soaked bread, and when, weary with toil, and faint with persecution, he was tempted to repeat the question, the same kindly voice ever whispered the inspiring injunction, 'Sing, little one, sing.' And sing he did, though his whole income for many years before his death in 1837, never exceeded one hundred and twenty pounds per annum.

We might almost fancy that the French poet had borrowed his story from Cædmon, who has been styled the Anglo-Saxon Milton. This early writer, as Bede relates, was present at a feast at which all were expected to carol some lay in turn. Feeling himself unable to comply, he went home, and when he fell asleep he dreamed that some one stood by, and, calling him by name, exclaimed, 'Sing me something.' The dreamer explained that he had left the banqueting hall because he had nothing to chant. 'But you shall sing to me,' replied the

peremptory phantom. Cædmon meekly asked what subject he should select? 'Sing the origin of creatures,' was the reply—a wonderfully wide theme for an utterly unpractised bard; but, 'obedient to the heavenly vision,' he straightway commenced his task, and, having completed it, became not only the founder of our sacred poetry, but probably the inspirer of Milton's matchless epic of the heavens.

Strikingly trivial was the incident which set the young soul of Baggesen, the Dane, on fire, and decided the entire course of his history. It was a kiss, but then it was a kiss which came from a Queen. Passing through Korsöer, the lovely but hapless Caroline Matilda, the sister of our third George, was attracted by the boy's face—he being then scarcely seven years of age. She honoured it with a kindly and gracious salute. From that moment he dated his intellectual birth. There arose in his soul an unconquerable desire to distinguish himself by some great efforts. He straightway ceased to think and act as a child, and soon became an ardent minstrel, aiming, as he observed, at the highest objects a poet could achieve. For the subsequent fifty years of his life that kiss may be said to have tingled in his heart, and left its royal flavour on his lips. Probably he carried it with him to his grave. Recognising its magical influence, for from it 'sprang the germ of his whole succeeding life,' ought he indeed to have suffered his lips to be soiled or dishonoured by any inferior salute?

Paley's sudden transformation from a drone into a worker, with a definite purpose before him, was due apparently to a casual reproof. After wasting two years of his undergraduate life at Cambridge, his mornings spent in bed, his evenings in company, one of his chums broke into his room at an early hour, and reproached him severely for the idle life he was leading. Forcibly

impressed by the manner of his visitor, the young student determined to change his course, and proceeded at once to lay plans for his reformation. Thenceforth he rose at five, studied during the greater part of the day; repaired in the evening to a coffee-house for his mutton-chop and dose of milk-punch; and in due time out there came from his brain that work of marvellous skill and matchless lucidity—the Natural Theology. His body sleeps in the Cathedral at Carlisle, but his mind will live on in that production as long as the English language lasts.

Again, an illness or an accident has sometimes been the opener of the Golden Gates. Disease may have struck a youth to the ground, but then the good genius has come, and, lifting him tenderly, has led him into the paths of renown. Dr. John Kitto might have lived and died in obscurity as a mason, had he not whilst a boy fallen from the roof of a house which he was slating in conjunction with a tippling parent. Unconscious for a fortnight, he then recovered to find himself temporarily crippled and permanently deaf. Under these painful circumstances, he turned his attention to books, and became an eager student. His father, who appears to have been decidedly much worthier of the accident than the son, sent him to the workhouse, where he continued for a considerable time, with a shoemaking interval; but, some of his small literary efforts attracting attention, scope was found for the exercise of his talents on a larger and more favourable scale. He became a contributor to various productions, an ardent and much observant traveller, and dying left a name of no little note in connection with Biblical literature. From that workhouse he found his way by dint of talent and energy to a fair standing-place at least on the Hill of Fame. In fact, it is by no means an uncommon case for a genius to take a decidedly wrong turn at the outset. He

may go up one lane, and then try another only to find that they are *culs-de-sac* so far as he is concerned.

James Fenimore Cooper, whose works constitute a little library in themselves, passed his early years in the navy; he then retired, and spent ten years more in undistinguished service; but at last he found that his business was to become the novelist of the sea, the prairies, and the Red Indian; and, taking this route, he was soon enabled to make his way to a position of prodigious popularity.

We know Rabelais as the prince of learned merry-andrews —one of those satyr souls who amuse whilst they disgust the observer by their wild freaks and drunken gambols. Had he followed his father's occupation as an innkeeper at Chinon, or dawdled his life away as a Franciscan friar at Fontenay-le-Comte, or made himself of service to his fellow-creatures in the capacity of a physician solely at Montpellier, all of which *rôles* he tried, posterity would probably never have known that such a man existed. But as the creator of the portentous giant Gargantua and the very renowned Pantagruel, his name has resounded through many centuries, and his writings have been looked into at least by most diligent students of literature, to say nothing of the curious peeps in which the more general reader, however fastidious, has occasionally indulged. Yet it was not until he was about fifty, and after apprenticing his pen to severer studies, that he discovered the line of activity to which he owes all his repute. There are many who think that it would have been better for mankind, as well as for Rabelais himself, had he attempted nothing grander in life than to play the tapster at the paternal inn, and nothing higher in literature than to amuse the paternal guests with humorous tales; but all must admit that as the *Homère bouffon* his genius was of an

extraordinary character, though unhappily of the dirtiest possible description.

Nay, even when a genius first turns his hand to his own peculiar line, it may be in such a way as to afford no indication of peculiar capability. Byron's case is a memorable one in this respect. There is as much difference between his *Hours of Idleness* and *Childe Harold*, as between the poet laureate of a tailor's establishment and the poet laureate of Great Britain! He, it is true, as a budding peer, and with his characteristic vanity, thought that a lord might fairly write in lounging verse; but when Jeffrey applied the critical scourge, the effect was magical. The 'namby-pamby' youth dilated in his dimensions until his shadow stretched wellnigh across the entire domain of poetry. Scott for a time divided the field, but the grace and sentiment of the novelist were unequal to the struggle with the fiery vigour and concentrated passion of the Childe, and the latter was left supreme in a realm where, in the opinion of his early critics, he was scarcely fit to hold office as a literary lackey or a gentleman's 'gentleman.' Many a poet of taste and elegance may attain his majority at a bound, whilst another of deeper feeling and wider thought, but of less impulsive personality, may remain unconscious of his resources until stung into activity by contemptuous treatment, or until some great draft is suddenly made upon his powers.

CHAPTER VI.

EN ROUTE FOR THE TEMPLE OF FAME.

TIME after time, a youth has been seen to leave his native village, and betake himself to the great highway, with much in his brain, and next to nothing in his pocket. No one whom he meets bestows upon him more than a careless glance or a condescending salute. The well-worn coat, the unshapely shoes, the bundle on his back, or the wallet in his hand, all appear to indicate that his lot in life is of the humblest order.

Whither bound?

Were he to reply frankly, and to disclose the secret of his heart, he would probably whisper in words trembling with emotion, 'TO THE TEMPLE OF FAME!'

A mysterious yearning for renown is generally assumed to be one of the most certain accompaniments of genius. 'Paint me an angel,' said Chatterton to an artist, when a child; 'paint me an angel with wings and trumpet, to trumpet my name over the world.' The love of distinction is unquestionably the prompter of grand deeds, and sometimes the sole suggester of great productions. It is as true in our times as it was in Milton's, that

> 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> To scorn delights, and live laborious days.'

But it is equally true, as he also says, 'that it is often an *infirmity* of noble minds.' Sought merely as an object of personal importance, valued exclusively, or even prominently, as an individual end and aim, the passion may be regarded simply as a 'radiant deceit.' It must therefore depend upon motive how far the longing for renown may be a real virtue or a positive demerit. To set the world a-talking is not of itself a legitimate object of ambition, even though no harm should be done to anybody. The appetite for glory which prompted the young Greek gentleman who amused himself by conquering kingdoms, and who would probably have led his troops into a neighbouring planet if he could have readily crossed the intervening abyss, or even have carried them round the solar system on a vague mission of slaughter had it been possible, was certainly a passion which admitted of little excuse, and for which he might very righteously have been hanged. It required battles; it signified so much bloodshed; it meant, in plain terms, that a vast number of people must die in order to make him great. In this sense, the observation of Plato is well within the truth, when he declares the fondness for glory to be as mean a vice as the fondness for money. Of course, in the case of many celebrated men, a considerable amount of personal conceit has been unfortunately alloyed with other and happier motives. It is the existence of this drossy ingredient which gives the works of such a writer as Byron the unhealthy and unsatisfactory character they must ever present to a thoughtful reader. In the peer's poems, you have his lordship perpetually exhibiting himself and his woes. He serves himself up as a standing dish in almost every piece. The purpose seems not so much to instruct or delight his readers, as to parade himself before the public, to make you stare at his recklessness, or to enlist your tears on behalf of his sorrows.

In some respects the desire for posthumous repute is still more equivocal. 'What can it matter to me,' remarked Cheselden, 'if a hundred years after I am dead, my name shall be pronounced so many thousand times every year, by so many thousands who never knew me?'

Abstractly speaking, nothing earthly can then affect a departed soul either for good or ill. Whether the world hisses his memory, or takes off its hat whenever his name is mentioned, 'the dull cold ear of Death' is closed alike to all expressions of hate or respect. That the longing for Fame should yet overpower this conviction, proves that there must be invincible vitality in the passion. The point could not be put more forcibly than it was at one time by Thomas Campbell; 'I would die to-morrow,' said he, 'for such renown as that of Napoleon.' His notions on this subject, however, underwent a striking revolution. 'Fame,' observed he, 'was everything in the world' to him when he composed the *Pleasures of Hope*, but before many suns had rolled over his head, he wrote, 'Lord help us, if one had the brains of Newton and Napoleon minced into his own individual celebrity, what would it be worth to him in a few years? Why, that plaster image of his dead skull would be carried about on the head of some Italian boy, vending it in the company of cats and mandarins, all wagging their heads together.' 'When I think,' said he again, speaking still more seriously, 'of the awfulness of the account I shall have to give of myself, how can literary fame appear to me but as nothing? Who will think of it then? If, on death, we enter on a new state, of what interest beyond his present life, can a man's literary fame be to him? None—when he thinks solemnly about it.' Of course, for present purposes, a writer may feel much joy (and who can wonder if it is accompanied by pride

as well) in the thought that at some given distance of time, say a hundred years, or a thousand years hence, some human being may be reading, with rapt attention, the production of his pen although he himself will be millions of miles away from earth Reasoning in like manner, a great artist may be charmed to think that generation after generation will gaze with gratified eyes upon some painting or statue which was the work of his hand, though the dexterous fingers and the cunning brain have long been resolved into dust. No mortal of lofty nature can well prove indifferent to the reflection that when his soul and body have done their work on this planet, and the former is pursuing its career in some far-off quarter of the universe, it has yet left behind it a heritage of intellectual pleasure which the touch of Time cannot wither, nor the dissolving oxygen of the atmosphere dissipate. In this fact lies the true glory and the bliss. Not that his name is known and remembered, but that a valued something survives, and not only survives, but lives on solely to give instruction and delight. Dead himself, so far as this life is concerned, his spirit still remains to hold converse with his fellow-creatures, to communicate his knowledge to posterity, to teach the great truths he explored, and to stir up noble resolves in gallant and generous hearts. Viewed in this light, the love of Fame cannot be an evil indulgence; but then viewed in this light also, it will be seen that it is an unselfish disinterested thing; and that, in short, the individual values the work he does, not for the personal honour it confers, but for the benefit it entails. Well did George Eliot remark that ambition could only be sanctified when allied to virtue. Their temples were one at Rome.

It has been admirably said of Kepler that, if a sentiment of pride occasionally mingled with his feelings, it was the pride

of being the chosen messenger of truth, not the vanity of being the favoured possessor of genius. Happily the great principle of modern morals (if such a term may be allowed, considering that morals are eternal and unalterable) is the principle of duty —that is to say, man is here not to seek his own glory, or to labour for his personal gratification, but honestly to execute his tasks to the best of his ability. It is not a primary question with him whether he secures honour or rewards, but whether he has proved a good and faithful servant in all he undertook.

'A man is relieved and gay,' as Emerson remarks, only when he has 'put his heart into his work, and done his best; but whatever he has said or done otherwise shall give him no peace.' Too often, indeed, ambition is little better than a miserable self-idolatry. The aspirant runs up a temple in his own honour, ingeniously entices the public to act as his worshippers, and possibly laughs in his sleeve when he sees them offering incense to a spurious idol at a tinsel shrine.

There is something exquisitely beautiful in the superiority to mere personal repute which some writers have displayed. Grace Kennedy, the authoress of *Father Clement* and various other works, which attained (the former especially) considerable popularity in their day, did not publish any of her compositions until she had reached her thirty-ninth year; and then it was done with so much secrecy that her own family were not aware that she possessed any literary power. She kept her secret from the public *during the whole of her life*, though one acceptable work after another proceeded from her fertile pen. It was not until she was dying, indeed, that she authorised her relatives to satisfy the curiosity which her productions had so long piqued. Then only did she bring herself to consent to the acknowledgment, because she thought that the solemn authentication

of a death-bed would give increased force to the pious principles she had ever advocated.

Whenever, therefore, the young aspirant sets out on his journey to Valhalla, he should take careful counsel with himself on this vital question. Pausing before he has proceeded many steps, he should inquire whether in his case the love of fame is a generous passion or a vain conceit? Is it the sign of a lofty longing to benefit his fellow-men, and to do honour to the bestower of the gift?—or is it the 'fond ambition to make a name'—the puerile vanity which aims at nothing but its own glorification? Remembering poor Chatterton's wish for an angelic trumpeter to go about creation puffing him into renown, we should recollect also that this unhappy youth was quite willing to earn notoriety by forging pedigrees, fabricating poems in the name of the monk Rowley, or writing spiteful squibs on any public character then current.

By way of contrast to the Bristol prodigy, the candidate for glory may be usefully reminded of another young poet, John Keats, who pursued his brief journey to the music of far nobler resolves. Speaking of the life he proposed to lead, he said he had his ambition, which was 'to do the world some' good as a poet. Many years might be consumed before this object was accomplished, but meanwhile he would endeavour to 'reach as high a summit in poetry' as the strength bestowed upon him would permit. The road to success, he knew, lay 'through application, study, and thought.' And then he propounded his great test of literary love and disinterested toil: 'I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shone upon them!'

Is our aspirant gifted with a soul like this? If so, let him

grasp his staff with a firm hand, and proceed on his journey with a stout heart and an indomitable will. To him may safely be applied the summary injunction which Samuel Parr addressed to Lytton Bulwer, in capital letters, in the postscript of a letter written by the learned Doctor (full of Greek and tobacco) to the budding novelist (full of romance and aspiration), when the latter was a boy of seventeen, and the former a sage of sixty-four—'BE AMBITIOUS.'

But where shall the youth, who has now fairly taken to the highway in search of the hill on which Fame's temple stands in peerless majesty, find this cloud-capt erection? Its precise locality is not indicated on any map, nor can he discover any clue to it by consulting either Bradshaw or Baedeker. In this island, however, all roads lead to London, as on the Continent *tous les chemins conduisent à Rome.* In the metropolis, at any rate, he may learn something of the path he should pursue to reach the radiant eminence. 'To London!' is therefore almost invariably the cry. Forth he goes, singing merrily, it may be, as a *vacuus viator* is privileged to do, for no footpad, however sorely distressed, would deem it worth while to plunder so unpromising a passenger.

> 'Eager-hearted as a boy when first he leaves his father's field,
> And at night along the dusty highway nearer and nearer
> Sees in heaven the light of London flaming like a dreamy dawn.'

Who would not like to have seen Samuel Johnson and David Garrick set out from Lichfield on their adventurous expedition to the capital? Brave hearts the two must have had, seeing that the one had only fourpence halfpenny, and the other not more three halfpence! To attempt to storm and carry the proud steep with no larger a stock of ammunition

at their command, was surely as bold a scheme as that of the rioters who proposed to capture the Tower of London with no more powder than an old stocking would contain. Over the gateways of all great capitals there seems to be inscribed the warning, 'Let no man enter here who is without cash, or who cannot beg, borrow, or steal that indispensable article.' Certainly the feelings of a stranger who plunges into a busy city without friends, without patrons, and, above all, without a single guinea in his purse—perhaps no purse at all—do not admit of easy definition. But who that has a wonderful Manuscript in his pocket ever doubts, still less despairs? Is it not convertible in a few hours into sterling coin? The only question with the writer, generally speaking, is, to whom shall he offer it, and how much shall he demand for the copyright? Then, too, has he not a hundred literary projects in his head, and is not his brain seething with poems and dramas and romances, and even epics of the most formidable cast?

How speedily this brilliant delusion is generally dispelled, is matter of proverbial note. Strewn as the road to eminence is with the bones of those who set out bravely but have perished by the way, the adventurer may give no heed to these melancholy relics; but almost as soon as he discovers that the streets of the metropolis are paved with stone instead of gold, does he also learn that the productions of genius are utterly unable to command a market if the author is unknown, or his name happens to be anything like plain John Nokes.

James Montgomery, one of the purest of our poets, after leaving the Moravian seminary at Fulneck, and after serving for a while in a retail shop at Mirfield, determined to make a dash at Fame, without knowing precisely how or where she was to be found. Setting out upon his journey with five

shillings to pay his way to Parnassus, he felt himself compelled to pull up at a village near Rotherham, where it became necessary for him, if he would not starve, to take a situation similar to the one he had just quitted. In a little time, however, he contrived to resume his travels, his goal being, of course, the metropolis, which he fondly regarded as the Paradise of Poets. Arrived there, he met with a kind reception from a bookseller, to whom he had submitted a volume of manuscript verses; but the worthy man shook his head when the idea of publication was broached. Bitterly disappointed, the youth tried prose and composed an Eastern story, which he took to another bibliopole. The latter proceeded at once to make a calculation as to the length of the piece, without troubling his head in the least respecting the nature of the subject or the merits of the composition. 'Too small! It won't do for me—take it to K——, who publishes these kind of things.' Confounded by this mechanical view of matters, the aspirant hastily withdrew, and in his agitated retreat came in contact with a lamp which he shattered, spilling the oil, and exciting the merriment of the grinning shopmen. For neither his prose nor his poetry did there seem to be a market in the Golden Capital, and so, disgusted with his failure, the poor bard returned to the north, where he resumed his old post behind the counter. And there in the north he remained until a side-door into literature opened upon him at Sheffield in the shape of a newspaper engagement.

But before he could scale the classic mount, he had some unpleasant bits of ground to traverse. Twice was he committed to prison—first for the publication of a song on the war, and second for a report of a riot, in which two men were killed by the military. York Castle is not an encouraging,

still less inspiring place for a young poet, nor can it be regarded as a fitting vestibule to the Temple of Renown; but there poor Montgomery was locked up for a time, diverting himself as best he could by writing a volume of verse under the Title of 'Prison Amusements.' The Muse very kindly visited him in that forbidding fortress, and did not scorn to spend many hours in the company of the imprisoned songster.

Again, what a pitiable prospect lay before that uncouth-looking young man with the shabby coat, the hungered look and weary halting step, as he travelled from Dover to London in the frosty month of February 1756. And when his twelve days' journey on foot had been accomplished, and he found himself a lone and penniless stranger in the metropolis—he, too, rapidly discovering that the streets were not even covered with the basest of metals; when further he found it necessary to lie down with the beggars in Axe Lane by night, and during the day to apply sorrowfully and unsuccessfully at the apothecaries' shops for permission to pound their drugs or make up their plasters—the heart of poor Oliver Goldsmith must have sunk low within him; and whatever vague notions he might cherish as the promptings of genius (for had he not written a tragedy?) he must have felt that the battle of life would probably be a bitter one for him. Later on he wrote to express the pain he felt at 'almost beginning the world again at the age of thirty-one.' 'You scarcely can conceive,' continued he, 'how much eight years of disappointment, anguish, and study have worn me down. I can now neither partake of the pleasure of a revel, nor contribute to raise its jollity. I can neither laugh nor drink, have contracted an hesitating, disagreeable manner of speaking, and a visage that looks ill-nature itself: in short, I have brought myself into a settled melancholy, and an utter disgust of all life

brings with it.' Fortunately, for Oliver there were gleams of brightness, and many hours of happiness in the future; but most of the Shining Ones have to confront a similar crisis, and struggle through it as best they can.

In July 1741, a friendless youth, seventeen years of age, entered Birmingham in search of work as a stocking weaver. He was a runaway apprentice—an outcast, as he said—for whom there seemed to be no place or purpose in this life. He had tramped all the way from Nottingham, sleeping in barns, or in the open air, or upon a butcher's block, as best he could. Robbed of the bags which contained his humble garments (for there are fiends who would plunder the poor of their last penny!) he found himself in that busy human hive, perhaps the forlornest soul in all its streets. He sat down to rest himself 'upon the north side of the old cross, near Philip Street,' when two men in aprons eyed him with some attention, and, then approaching, offered him a pint of ale; 'for,' said one of them, 'I know what it is to be a distressed traveller.' They took him to a public-house, where they treated him to bread, cheese, and beer, and then procured him a lodging where he slept for three halfpence. Twenty-seven years afterwards, this obscure individual was the respected overseer of the very parish which he had entered as the poorest of the poor. Thirty-one years afterwards he became one of the Judges of the Court of Request of that same district, and there, for nineteen years, he sat deciding suits between his fellow-citizens, upwards of a hundred thousand causes having passed through his hands during the interval. This man was William Hutton, author of much useful literature, whose life furnished a splendid incentive to industry and to honourable exertion in face of the most adverse conditions. Could he have foreseen,

when he sat down 'upon the north side of the Old Cross near Philip Street,' on the evening in question, what a successful career was before him, might he not have danced—some would have got dishonourably drunk—out of pure gaiety of heart?

There are, of course, 'short cuts' to the glittering temple as well as long and rocky routes. Garrick and Johnson, to whom reference has just been made, are names in point. The former reached the summit by easy strides, and with unfluttered breath: the latter clambered painfully up the steep, mostly on hands and knees; and when the staff of patronage was held out to assist him, we know how disdainfully it was declined,—help had been delayed 'till he was indifferent and could not enjoy it; till he was solitary and could not share it; till he was known and did not want it!'

CHAPTER VII.

THAT IMPORTANT MANUSCRIPT.

ARRIVED, then, at the great mart for Literature, as for distinction of every description, the eager adventurer has to determine what practical steps he shall take to push his way to fame and fortune. Whilst searching for a publisher—and formerly it was requisite to inquire for a patron as well—let us learn something of the history of his all-important Manuscript. When the first flutterings of literary ambition agitated the aspirant's mind, and he began to dream of writing something which the world would receive with rapture—

> 'To frame it knows not what excellent thing,
> And win it knows not what sublime reward
> Of praise and honour,'

the great question, of course, was What subject should he select? What form should his opening enterprise assume?

A famous French author planned a work entitled *Ce qu'il-y-a dans une bouteille d'encre.* And certainly many wonderful productions have issued out of a very tiny flask of ink. Those stories of genii cooped up in phials, and emerging when the stopper was withdrawn, their shapes expanding until they seemed to fill all space, must surely be allegorical representations of the great creations which have sometimes emerged from

slender bottles of japan. A vessel not larger than an ordinary decanter would suffice to hold in suspension a dozen of the most prized productions of human genius. The *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, the *Divina Commedia* would have needed no reservoir of profound capacity to supply the necessary fluid. A vinegar cruet would accommodate all that was required for *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, or Butler's *Analogy*. A thimble is not too small for all we have of Juvenal, Anacreon, or the poet Gray.

Curious that the same standish which, if it falls into fitting hands, will prove the well-spring of some immortal work, may, if otherwise directed, serve only to indite bills of parcels or dry legal forms! None but a master in magic, or a true apprentice in the craft, can evoke the witching spirit from such a source, whatever incantations may be employed.

Imagine, then, a sanguine youth sitting down with the wonderful flask before him, and fondly inquiring what great composition shall be extracted? With undue self-depreciation, Mr. Ruskin says of his early efforts that, in the 'daily swelling foam of furious conceit,' he set himself in his seventeenth year 'in a state of majestic imbecility' to write a tragedy (of course Shakespearian) on a Venetian subject, in which the sorrows of his soul were to be 'enshrined in immortal verse. The fair heroine Bianca was to be endowed with the perfections of Desdemona and the brightness of Juliet, and Venice and love were to be described as never had been thought of before.'

In some cases, indeed, when a youth prepares for his great initial work he may be supposed to address a kind of caution to the manes of the Bard of Avon:—'Look now to your laurels, William Shakespeare! You have long reigned supreme in your particular domain. But take notice that a competitor such as

you have never yet encountered has now entered the lists, and intends to run you hard in public esteem. You will find it out, I daresay, before my beard is well grown, and if you are shelved before the age is well over I should not be greatly surprised!'

Not in this spirit, however, are works of sterling power or lasting value likely to be produced. Most probably the youth fixes upon some fanciful or imaginative theme. Why there should be such a tendency to resort to the realms of romance, and to seek employment there, is a fact which admits of easy solution. In the first place, fiction, generally speaking, requires very little research. A man may set up as a novelist without any noticeable stock in trade. In the selection of a profession thousands are determined by the simple question whether it demands the possession of much capital: if it does, they are excluded; if it does not, they rush into it without caring to inquire whether their brains are at all adapted to the duties involved. Of course a writer may expend as much thought and labour upon the production of a novel or a drama as would be required for a history or a philosophy. But few probably do. For one man who would deliberately undertake a *Decline and Fall* like Gibbon, or a *History of Europe* like Alison, there are scores who would think nothing of opening a series of novels almost as numerous as those of G. P. R. James or Alexandre Dumas. There are not many romancers certainly who could say, as Charles Reade did, 'I studied the art of fiction for fifteen years before I presumed to write a line.' And what he meant by study may be gathered from a little incident which Mr. Colman relates. On referring to a certain character in one of his books (Dr. Sampson), the author produced a huge sheet of cardboard divided into columns, and filled with

anecdotes, peculiarities, and other particulars respecting a certain individual who had served as the living model, and whose traits had not only been carefully scrutinised, but as minutely recorded. This was but one out of innumerable sheets similarly devoted to other oddities within range of observation.

Another reason for the choice of fiction is that the author is not tied to facts or definite details. He may ramble hither or thither at his own good will and pleasure. He may imagine anything he chooses, and one thing just as well as another. He may manipulate the fortunes of his heroes as appears most convenient, and may marry or murder them as caprice prescribes. There is of course a joyous sense of freedom in all this which does not belong to the writer who has to toil hard to gather the best evidence he can, and still harder to determine the precise result; who must consult his authorities at every point, and is not at liberty to make his battles end as he would wish, or to conduct his sieges as the Abbé Vertot once did, in the absence of legitimate material—purely out of his own brain. '*Mon siège est fini*,' said he, when the facts arrived.

There is also another consideration which is exquisitely flattering to human vanity; and this alone is sufficient to attract crowds to the flowery fields of fiction. Since page after page is spun out of his own head, the writer proceeds under the delightful conviction that he is creating. All those thoughts, all those fancies, all those characters are of his own production. 'This is mine,' he is apt to exclaim at the conclusion of every sentence, with an intoxicating sense of proprietorship. What may be the value of his lucubrations is quite a distinct question. Hence, such a writer advances under a running fire of self-laudation, carrying his own cloud of incense with him, and enjoying one of those subtle feasts of vanity which are all the

more gratifying because they are served up under the guise of honourable exertion.

As little must we overlook the fact that works of fiction constitute the easiest possible reading, and for that reason they will ever remain the most popular form of composition. And if it be added that they are now supposed to be the most remunerative, need we be surprised if the temptation to write a novel or a drama should prove irresistible where a man's genius is not otherwise definitely and peremptorily directed?

Goethe makes a severe remark which, if it were strictly correct, might explain why so many aspirants take to poetry at first, and why so many mediocrities keep to it to the last. 'To write prose,' he observes, 'a person must have something to say; but he who has nothing to say can still make verses and rhymes, where one word suggests the other; and at length something comes out, which in fact is nothing.' Disgusting this assertion must appear, for it should be remembered that if easy stanzas or rhyming platitudes may be spun out of very humble skulls, the production of genuine durable poetry, on the other hand, has ever been regarded as one of the highest tasks as well as truest tests of genius.

But taking it for granted that the hallowed fire glows in our aspirant's intellect, it may be interesting to inquire into the origin of his opening production. The conception of a work may be instantaneous. A sudden flash of fancy, and lo! the plan of some great literary edifice starts up before the mind in colossal grandeur! The rest is matter of detail and minute elaboration, though demanding probably as much genius to execute the scheme harmoniously as it did to form the original design. Given the notion of a war in heaven, or of a pilgrimage from this world to the next, or of a visit to a land where the

inhabitants are so small that you could hold half a dozen in the palm of your hand, or so large that they could snap off a church steeple if so disposed, and it is plain that none but a writer of consummate talent could work out these conceptions effectually, and fill in the outlines with due proportion and perfect finish. Of course in such cases the germinal idea is the most important element, and it is this to which we can best give the title of Inspiration.

Pollok, the author of that once celebrated but now antiquated poem, *The Course of Time*, was one night sitting alone in an old chamber at Moorhouse (an ancient fabric dating from before the battle of Bannockburn), with his mind full of solemn fancies, for his mother then lay dying, when, in a moment the notion of the work seized him as if by beneficent possession; the plan unfolding itself to his view so vividly that at a glance he saw from the beginning to the end, just as if he were looking down some magnificent avenue of ideas and images. This sudden revelation almost overpowered him, and marked the day and hour with an indelible sign for himself, and a somewhat memorable one for the sacred literature of his day.

One of the most striking ballads ever composed—striking it would be if it had no other charm than that of motion, for who that has read Bürger's 'Leonore' has not joined in that awful gallop of a thousand miles with the Dead, and shuddered as he rode 'tramp, tramp along the land, splash, splash across the sea'—was suggested by listening casually to the song of a peasant girl. The words were:—

'Der Mond der scheint so helle,
Die Todten reiten so schnelle,
Feins Liebchen, graut dir nicht.'

These lines sank so deeply into the poet's imagination, and

vibrated so forcibly in his ear, that he sketched out the wonderful poem without delay, and on showing it to his friend Boie, the latter was so enchanted that he gave the writer no rest until the piece was completed.

Whilst wandering on the plains of Troy, with the lightnings playing round the top of Mount Ida—standing upon Asia, and gazing upon Europe, with the classic Hellespont rolling between—a young man, whose ambition led him to seek immortality as a poet, conceived the idea of an Epic which should embody the spirit of his own convulsionary age. What (thought he) Homer had done for the heroic times, what Virgil accomplished for a period when states were in course of consolidation, what Dante effected for a national and ecclesiastical era, what Milton achieved for his own more religious century, all this he would perform for the most turbulent and fiery of human epochs! Could the Reign of Terror, he asked, be a less important event than the siege of Troy? Was it possible that the meteoric exploits of Napoleon would prove less interesting than the feats of Achilles or the wanderings of Ulysses? 'For me then,' said this soaring soliloquist, 'remains the Revolutionary Epick.'

His name was Benjamin Disraeli. The ambitious production was written, but it found few readers and still fewer purchasers. It has never been placed on the same shelf with the classic Homer or Virgil, and never weighed in the same balance with the *Divina Commedia* or *Paradise Lost*. It has not even taken conspicuous rank in the world's great catalogue. Happily the author had the good sense to perceive that this pretentious vein was a sign of weakness and not of strength, and sobering down in his writings, as he afterwards did in his Parliamentary speeches, he became one of the most popular and commanding men of his age.

Not unfrequently a work of merit has owed its origin to some sportive remark or laughable incident.

A poem, of no mean celebrity in Italian literature, the *Ricciardetto* of Nicolo Fortiguerra, was the product of a playful challenge. A discussion having arisen amongst some friends respecting the merits of the *Orlando Furioso* and the wonderful skill which the author must have possessed to elaborate such a composition, Fortiguerra maintained that Ariosto might have accomplished all he did with small expenditure of time, whatever amount of ability might be involved; and in proof of his assertion he offered to write a canto of a poem of the same sort within the space of four-and-twenty hours. The next morning he appeared with the first section of the *Ricciardetto*, read it to his friends with unbounded applause, and was earnestly solicited to carry on and complete the work.

The germinal conception of a production has occasionally been the subject of much contention. 'That idea was mine alone,' says the proud author. 'No,' replies another indignantly, 'you will find it indicated in my little essay, contained in such a periodical; or embodied in my great work on such a subject, which the public has inconsiderately overlooked.' 'You are both wrong,' mutters a sepulchral voice from the depth of some vault; 'I anticipated you three or four centuries ago, and if you will take down a much neglected treatise entitled *De Omnibus Rebus* in the Bodleian Library, and turn to page 1064, you will find it distinctly expressed. You moderns are apt to forget your obligations to your predecessors. You plunder us, and then put back the volume on the top shelf, or in some out-of-the-way corner, covering it with dust for the same purpose as the spider span its web at the mouth of Mahomet's cave; and then, wiping your mouths, you attempt to look as innocent

as possible, and pretend that you never heard there was such a production in existence. Thieves, all of you!'

'If,' said the most renowned of German writers, 'I could give an account of all I owe to great predecessors and contemporaries, there would be a small balance in my favour.'

When Campbell was told that his 'Last Man' had been suggested by Lord Byron's 'Darkness,' he was not a little annoyed, and wrote to Jeffrey to explain that the imputation ought to be reversed.. The Last was really the First in conception, though not in execution. Many years before the publication of his lordship's little ebon composition, the two bards held a memorable conversation, in which Campbell drew a picture of a being watching the extinction of his species, and the winding-up of the great drama of creation; hinting that this would form a striking subject for a poem. In design at least the patent right lay with Campbell. Could he have foreseen that such a question would ever be raised, he declared he would have communicated with his lordship on the subject before the final Darkness fell upon the titled bard; but he did not like, as he said, to 'dun' him for any acknowledgment of originality.

It is not often perhaps that a writer deliberately executes a great scheme, or a series of great works, with the fulness of purpose for which his admirers afterwards give him credit. Sometimes indeed he is wholly innocent of the design imputed to him, and laughs in his sleeve (if he lives long enough) to find himself credited with a profundity of meaning to which he never aspired.

Goethe was often amused to hear the widely differing speculations entertained by his readers respecting his *Wilhelm Meister* and still more his *Faust.*

What, too, could be the meaning of *Peter Schlemihl*, the

shadowless man? Many a subtle suggestion was made respecting the vanished appendage, but what says Chamisso himself on the subject? '*Schlemihl* came forth in this way. On a journey I had lost my hat, portmanteau, gloves, handkerchief, and all my movable effects. Fouqué asked me whether I had not lost my shadow as well? Then we portrayed to ourselves the consequences of such a calamity.' That was all! And yet Peter became something of a German classic, and at the same time a literary enigma.

Machiavelli would doubtless have indulged in many a grim smile could he have foreseen that critics and commentators would gather round his *Principe*, and throw out their guesses or hazard their solutions, as if it were some grave riddle which the wily Florentine had propounded to puzzle the brains of posterity.

Plato's purpose has been the subject of much speculation. Was there a preconceived scheme in his mind when he wrote his Dialogues—a scheme to which all of them were contributory; or were they separate productions, having no internal connection and no philosophical interdependence? Schleiermacher maintained that the great Greek evoked them all from one primitive principle; that they are all inseparably associated, and that, if taken in due order, each one presupposed its predecessor, and opened a way for its successor; in short, that the whole Platonic series was shaped and matured within that broad-browed head as the parts of a magnificent cathedral are put together in the mind of an architect before they are embodied in stone. Ast, on the contrary, contended that there was no unity of design in the productions, no special purpose in the brain of the writer, no gradual development of a particular philosophy, and that they were as diverse compositions as the

essays of Bacon, or the political leaders in a modern newspaper. In some instances, indeed, authors have been almost as much at fault in reference to their own compositions as the public. 'Upon my honour,' said Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these Allegories.' Hegel, it is well known, complained that there was only one person who could grasp his philosophy, and that even he failed to do so fully; and it has been comically but not unnaturally asked whether Hegel himself understood it completely! Would it be unpardonable impudence, indeed, to inquire whether many of the German thinkers like Schelling, Oken, and others ought not to have had a special race of disciples, created for the purpose of studying and mastering their work? May there not be some truth in the apophthegm that he who is not intelligible is not intelligent?

In some cases too we should probably find that instead of working upon a systematic plan, and evolving the whole scheme by consecutive steps, the details had been tumbled out of the author's brain by a series of very disjointed efforts. Only from the head of Jupiter himself can a Minerva come forth fully shaped and completely armed. Hence there are few writers perhaps who could give a connected history of the fabrication of any of their productions. In a paper entitled the 'Philosophy of Composition' Edgar Poe discloses the several steps by which his well-known poem the 'Raven' was built up; and a curious revelation it would be if it possessed the one great merit of truth. But unfortunately the noted unveracity of the writer deprives it of all reliable value. The explanations he gives read too much like an after-analysis of the piece, and it is almost as difficult to believe that such a marvellous production could have been elaborated upon the mechanical principles he represents, as

it would be to suppose that it could have been written by piling up words at random out of the dictionary. To tell us that the refrain of the mystic bird, the awful 'Never more' which shut the lover up in his everlasting misery, was dictated by a cold-blooded conviction that the poem must be broken at intervals by some word containing the vowel 'o' in connection with the consonant 'r,' is pretty much the same as to say that the 'Dead March' in *Saul* was composed to introduce a few measured taps on the drum.

Whilst, however, the initial work—whatever it may be—is in progress, who can tell the alternations of fear and hope with which the writer's soul is agitated? Now high on the crest of the buoyant wave, now down in the deepest trough of despondency! There are moments which an angel might envy: there are others which an outcast spirit might beg to decline. Intense dissatisfaction with his efforts must often freeze the current of thought, or check its flow, until the rush of the river is lost in the tiny rivulet which trickles its way along its stony bed and struggles with boulders at every step. Even Milton sometimes found it difficult to compose a single couplet. Time after time the blind harpist of Paradise would lie awake for hours, waiting for the winds of inspiration, coming no man knoweth whence, but waiting in vain: for the poetical faculty sometimes deserted him completely, whilst on other occasions the longed-for spirit would bear down upon him like a whirlwind; and then, summoning his daughter to his side, he would dictate line after line to her with almost breathless rapidity.

Frequently too a writer may be so stirred by his task that he is unable to keep the secret in his own breast. He is like Midas, who must whisper it into the ground if not into the open air. Schiller always felt a strong desire for some companion to

whom he could impart his ideas in the very act of conception. He could never cease talking about his literary undertakings: it was not enough to have a mere correspondent, however able or attentive, nor even a consulting acquaintance in the same town or yet in the same street; for to reach this person it would be necessary to attire himself for the visit, and in traversing the road his ideas might be dissipated, or the fit of inspiration suddenly suspended! A poet's rising fancies are too fragile and delicate a material to be put into a portmanteau as it were, and carried about like so much luggage or prosaic lumber. It was precisely the reverse with the German Jupiter, for he did his work in silence and rarely revealed his purpose until it was accomplished. Not one syllable about *Hermann und Dorothea*, for instance, did he breathe until he showed the finished production to his literary compeer.

Perhaps, too, there may be some friend or gentle companion interested in the work almost as much as the writer himself. Whilst Buckle was composing his *History of Civilisation*, he read the pages to his mother as they were penned, and received her loving criticisms with profound respect. On the completion of the first volume, she was urgent that it should be published without waiting for the rest. Anxious to mature the work, even if it cost him twenty years of labour, the author was naturally averse to the idea of production by instalments. But the good lady had reason to believe that her life would not be of the longest; and she had one ambition to gratify before she left the world! 'Surely,' exclaimed she, 'God will let me live to see Henry's book!' Not until her son's title to fame had been secured could she dream of departing. Shall we not rank this as another of the sublimities of maternal affection with which, happily, the history of the human race abounds? And by the

by, could we only divest the remark of a seeming touch of impiety, was there ever a grander expression of Love, for instance, than that of the poor woman, who when her priest was expatiating upon the offering of Isaac by his father, replied, 'True, but God would never have asked it of a mother!' The matchless trust of that worthy creature in the mercy—may we not say, in the tender courtesy, of Heaven, as if a mother's affection were too sacred a thing to be made the subject even of a divine experiment—has been adduced before now as one of the most daring and yet most natural illustrations of the Sublime.

In short, if we could project ourselves into the author's mind during the composition of his opening work, share in all his alternating hopes and fears, and realise all the exciting conditions under which it was penned, we might readily indorse Miss Landon's remark, that a 'history of the how and where works, especially of imagination, have been produced, would often be more extraordinary than the works themselves.'

CHAPTER VIII.

GOING TO PRESS AND FIRST APPEARANCE.

BUT suppose the important Manuscript completed—indeed long before completion—there comes the great question of publication.

How and where?

Not many young authors can expect to imitate Sir Humphry Davy; for, says his brother Dr. Davy, 'almost as soon as he began writing, he began printing. No fair copy was made: the MS. was transferred, sometimes the same day and hour, from his pen to the press.'

In the case even of brief compositions, not entitled to the honour of an independent volume, the selection of a fitting vehicle is a matter of the profoundest anxiety. What magazine or review will be the likeliest to accept the proffered article, and to bring the writer into the readiest communication with his future constituents, that is to say, with the world at large?

Bitterly distasteful to a young poet Southey's counsel must have been, when he recommended the aspirant to send his verses in the first instance to the newspapers; then, if inserted, and still more if copied voluntarily into other journals, he might safely regard it as an indication of merit, and also as a hint from the Muses to proceed. But when the Keswick bard added

the suggestion that this should be done under some fictitious signature, and, still more, that any succeeding pieces should be issued under other names equally fanciful, the recommendation must have proved unutterably loathsome to any youth who hoped to leap into Fame at a bound. But worse than all was the icy remark—meant, however, in all honesty, but enough to freeze the blood though it were rolling like molten silver through the veins—that if those verses pleased nobody, and nobody either praised or noticed them, they would at any rate escape criticism and abuse! Just imagine the curl of the lip, and the flash of the eye, in the case of many a poetaster, if such diabolical probabilities were even hinted!

Not without many a misgiving, however, is this question of first publication finally settled, for it is perhaps a point—so the author supposes—which may determine the whole complexion of his literary career. Shall we venture to follow the fateful Manuscript?

Carefully folded, lest the precious document should present a clumsy appearance to the editor's eye; carefully sealed, lest some mischievous soul should abstract it by the way, or pillage it of its best passages; carefully addressed, lest it should travel to the Dead Letter Office, unless the direction were a marvel of legibility; carefully deposited by the writer in the receiving box, lest any other hands should prove treacherous if intrusted with the delivery—the wonderful packet is at length silently launched, and the young author retires to bed to dream dreams of coming fortune, and see visions of boundless glory.

Next morning, when the gay hopes of the evening came in contact with the chilling realities of day, one question presents itself with startling force—Will his composition be accepted? At first, perhaps, he had no fear; but now he reflects that there

are some editors who cannot discern merit, others who will not acknowledge it, however undeniable, and not a few who can detect little else on the sun's bright disc than dark spots and sooty patches of portentous size. He will, however, hope for the best. There will be a speedy answer—probably by return of post? He lies in wait, accordingly, for the letter-carrier, throwing himself in the way when the bringer of tidings appears, and asking, with an air of indifference, which his tremulous voice belies, whether there is anything for him to-day. Alas, there is no response from the editor ('able' or otherwise), either to-day or to-morrow, or the next day! But for this, possibly, he finds a charitable excuse. Editors, he knows, are full of business; they are overwhelmed with applications, their tables are heaped with contributions from established writers; they cannot find time to read strange communications for weeks to come; besides, it is not their wont to acknowledge the receipt of articles in general. He must therefore wait until the next number of the periodical appears, and then probably he will see himself in all the splendours of type. Even a writer like Southey—veteran as he might be called at the time—was all impatience to read his first article in the *Quarterly Review*. 'Young lady,' wrote he once, 'never felt more desirous to see herself in a new ball dress, than I do to see my own performance in print, often as that gratification falls to my lot.'

When the month, however, is expiring, it is with many a flutter of the heart that the young writer turns to the advertisement columns where it is usual to announce the contents of forthcoming periodicals. His eye at last rests upon the title of the one in which Cæsar's fortunes are embarked. Let no one be surprised to learn that he dare not scan the table of contents at once. The little tricks he plays with himself, before he ventures

fairly upon the attempt, are amusing in the recollection, however serious they may be in the actual occurrence. Partially averting his glance, he will take in the measure of the lines, to see if any heading is likely to correspond in length with that affixed to his own article. Perhaps there is none to answer. But still this may be explained—the editor may have cut down his title or substituted another. After several sidelong essays, all failing as the eye comes to the charge, he makes desperate lunge at the first item in the list. Alas, it is not his! It is on some subject so lofty or so recondite, that his heart sinks within him under the conviction that he can be no fit companion for such erudite composers. Rebuffed, he next turns to the last article on the list. Neither is that his! Afterwards he travels through the table slowly, suspiciously wrenching his eye, as it were, from each successive heading with increasing effort as his prospects diminish; and then, travelling back to ascertain whether his effusion may not perhaps be hidden under some altered appellation, he is compelled at length to conclude that he is not amongst the company of the Elect!

The human mind, however, is wonderfully inventive when self-love or self-interest propels the machinery. A dozen explanations are discovered for the omission. He must therefore tarry until the following number appears, and then, doubtless, all will be right, and the grand *coup* which is to open the way to renown will be accomplished. But the next number comes forth, and for him it is sternly silent, implacably oblivious. Harsh thoughts now spring up in his mind. He is indignant at the able editor, but will give him another month to mend his ways! and when this interval too passes without the least notice of his production, he writes a note of cutting brevity, intended to freeze the very marrow in the man's bones by its

contemptuous dignity, to request that the article may be returned to its owner. Before he has posted it, however, there arrives a packet which he opens eagerly, for it answers in bulk to his own manuscript, and will probably contain the same with the proof sheets after all; but who can describe his chagrin (doubled by the short gleam of hope) when he learns that his 'valuable paper,' much to the regret of the editor, is not deemed suitable to the pages of the periodical the latter has the honour to conduct!

It is well to be out of the sight and hearing of that frantic soul when the purport of this communication is realised.

It is a terrible word is the word 'Rejected'! There are at least three conditions under which its utterance is profoundly perturbing. Once, as we have seen, when the production which is to form the foundation-stone of eminence is returned, whether with or without thanks; once, when the matrimonial offer, upon which the happiness of a life seems to be staked, is declined without rhyme or reason; and once, when the Spirit, laden with earth's follies and drugged with earth's cheats, knocks at the gates of heaven, and the stern reply 'Depart' explodes in a moment all the delusions upon which it rested its hopes of a blissful eternity.

In the first case, however, the sufferer may lawfully console himself with the conviction that many writers of unquestionable ability have gone through the same process, and not only survived, but learned to laugh at their early rebuffs. 'It may be of some comfort to youthful aspirants,' writes Mr. James Payn, whose stories have earned such merited popularity, 'that in one year I had six-and-twenty articles rejected by various organs!' Persevering man, that! But there may be many other initial difficulties to surmount.

Bernard Barton, when desirous of issuing a volume of poems, felt himself compelled to inquire whether it was lawful for a Quaker to publish verses—especially verses of a dramatic description! Could he, as an honest Friend, even venture to perpetrate rhyme at all? He knew that his brethren would look jealously—many of them reprovingly—upon such a Gentile proceeding. With troubled mind he sought counsel. Southey, a bard and a Christian (characters not always combined even in modern Britain) encouraged him to proceed, and told him that if poetry were a crime, the Bible ought to be placed in the *Index Expurgatorius*. He also asked the opinion of Byron, a bard with a sufficient touch of the blackguard in his composition to ensure him very worldly advice, and was characteristically enjoined to flirt with the Muses as furiously as he liked. Barton accordingly paid his addresses to those good ladies, though in a discreet fashion. He met with censure from some of his co-religionists, but it is to be hoped that they found nothing more heinous in his pieces than the use of the word 'November,' which one of them denounced as a concession to heathen forms of speech.

A dramatic author gives a pathetic and yet richly humorous account of the miseries which writers of his class frequently encounter before the curtain falls upon a successful production. None but those who have passed through the many dreary stages which must be traversed before this point is reached, can form an adequate conception of the dangers of the route. For such tempters of fortune it is not until all the toils and throes of composition have been undergone, all the pangs of literary parturition endured, that the practical agonies commence. The first step is, of course, to submit the work to a manager; but how to get it read, then how to get it approved, and, if declined, how

to get it returned, are appalling questions for an impetuous aspirant; for he knows that he must await the caprice or convenience of a little theatrical potentate, whose experience has possibly taught him that nine out of every ten manuscripts submitted for perusal are hopeless trash. Most probably, after a long delay, and many intermediate applications, the piece is politely rejected as unsuitable, in which case a similar round must be pursued with another or with several other *impresarios*. Should it be accepted at last, it must then tarry its time until it can be read to the assembled troupe, when of course, it is criticised, not as a work of literary skill, but as a collection of 'parts' which must be regarded from a purely business point of view. Each individual not only inquires whether the character he has to represent will suit his powers, but also whether it will be obscured, or in any way prejudiced, by the superior opportunities which the play may accord to a rival actor, or even to a friendly colleague. The author knows that he is entirely in the hands of the conflicting performers, and that, if they do not relish their *rôles*, their want of interest, still more of enthusiasm, will assuredly ruin the representation.

But supposing this ordeal to be passed, the poor playwright is next beset with requests or even commands for sundry alterations. The manager considers certain scenes impracticable, or he holds certain passages inadmissible, or he requires certain additions to be made, in utter defiance of all the symmetries of plan or plot; and, with these imperious suggestions, the wretched dramatist must comply, or forfeit all chance of favour. Of course the leading actors also clamour for changes or 'improvements' in their parts; one demanding matter for a laugh, another a claptrap sentiment to rouse the gallery, and a third some palpable hit which will enable him to make his exit from

a particular scene amidst a tempest of applause. These maddening requisitions must be met. Knife, lancet, saw, hatchet, must be used in cutting, paring, disjointing the production. Here sorrowfully suppressing, there violently inserting, everywhere painfully remodelling—the poor scribe must go through a world of torture before his play can be completed for exhibition.

But completed indeed—No! After all this cruel surgery he may find that the star performer throws up his part as unworthy of his talents or his reputation, leaving some humbler actor to fill his place; or perhaps the great man speaks coldly or even adversely of the production; and, by prophesying its failure, damps the energies of the whole staff to such an extent that sentence of condemnation becomes inevitable.

Again, before the critical night arrives, the rehearsals must be undertaken; and here, too, there are pitfalls innumerable. How can the author hope to school every actor into the proper comprehension of his part, seeing that a faulty tone, an overdone gesture, an erroneous pause, a missing emphasis, an ill-directed glance, may seriously mar the expected effect?

But, still worse, when the hour of actual representation arrives, who shall say what horrible anxieties rack the dramatist's soul? He knows that he is at the mercy of a hundred contingencies, over which, be it observed, he can exercise no control, for everything is then beyond his reach. He cannot dictate to the skies whether they shall rain to his discomfiture or laugh in his honour; he cannot ensure himself that a leading performer shall not be disabled by illness or crippled by yesternight's over-indulgence; neither can he tell what casual visitant to the theatre may happen to raise a hiss, or lead a cheer at the most critical moment of all.

Nor does the danger end here, for the success of one evening

may be neutralised by the apathy of the next, and totally reversed by the disapprobation of the third. And if the poor dramatist, instead of being called before the curtain at the conclusion to enjoy a torrent of applause, finds himself constrained to leave the theatre amidst a storm of sibilation—hands to his ears, heart on his lips—who would care to sit down to that man's supper, to have that man's dreams for the night, or to wake with that man's reflections on the following morning?

But should a young writer be fortunate in his approaches to the press or the public, the joy of a first appearance in print is one of the most exquisite pleasures which fortune ever permits a mortal to realise. Pure mental rapture like this has a savour of Paradise about it, which not even the first fit of love (with its unconscious dash of earthliness) can legitimately rival.

One evening in January 1834, a young man with eager eyes and animated countenance—a face so flashing, indeed, that, as Leigh Hunt said, it had the life and soul in it of fifty human beings—dropped a packet 'into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street'—dropped it in stealthily as if he were a modern conspirator, and as if it were a packet of revolutionary dynamite. It contained, however, nothing more explosive than a sketch of 'Mrs. Joseph Porter, over the way,' and the deed of darkness was perpetrated at the publishing quarters of the *Monthly Magazine*. The youth awaited the result with keen expectation. After a few days the next number of the periodical appeared, and there, to his unspeakable delight, he found his article in print! Having purchased a copy, his excitement was so great that he walked down to Westminster Hall, into which he turned for half-an-hour, because, said he, 'my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there.' This young

man, of course, was Charles Dickens, and the article constituted his maiden manifestation in print.

Still more exulting was Douglas Jerrold's behaviour when his first contribution was inserted in the periodical to which he was attached as a compositor: he rushed home exclaiming, 'It's in—it's in!'

And if the first appearance leads to a first fee, it is all the sweeter, particularly if it comes to one in lowly circumstances, who hopes to make his bread by the produce of his brain. The poetical basket-maker, Thomas Miller, entered London with three half-crowns in his pocket, leaving a wife and several children for the time in the shadow of Sherwood Forest. After pursuing his humble calling for a while, he was invited to send a specimen of his verses to the editor of one of the annuals. He proceeded to work at once. There was no gilt-edged foolscap for him, and so he had to content himself with a scrap of 'whitey-brown' paper which had seen service at the grocer's; nor was any shining Japan ink at his disposal, and therefore he mixed some soot with water for the purpose; still less was he in possession of any cabinet of valuable wood and cunning design, with cosy compartments and secret drawers, and therefore the back of a bellows did duty as a writing-desk. In this fashion he penned his lines on an 'Old Fountain.' When finished, he had no wax to seal his letter, neither was he able to boast of a single wafer; all he could do, therefore, was to moisten a bit of bread, and use it as a pauper adhesive.

Marvellous to say, the verses were accepted immediately, and, still more marvellous to add, the editor remitted the author a couple of guineas for his reward! This, to the enraptured poet, was a little fortune: he had never been so rich in his life before; and consequently, when he retired to bed, he barred the door

carefully, fearing that some of the metropolitan burglars might hear of his acquisition, in which case they would infallibly try to break through and steal the treasure! What with delight, and what with alarm, he never slept all that night! Verily this was a charming incident in the life of a poet-artisan, who, as he subsequently remarked, might often be seen in the morning in Lady Blessington's splendid drawing-room, where he became a familiar visitor, and 'in the same evening standing on Westminster Bridge between an apple-vendor and a baked potato merchant, vending his baskets.'

'I have great news to tell you,' wrote another humble bard, Robert Nicol, the Scotch poet, when his first story was inserted in *Johnstone's Magazine*. Though occupying only a page and a half, there it was in readable type, and what more, he asked, could be said of the Waverley Novels? Two of his aunts, to whom he revealed the fact, attempted to throw cold water upon his literary ardour. 'Dinna be an author,' said they; 'they're aye puir.' 'So they may,' replied Nicol, 'in this world's goods; but there are better riches than silver or gold, or houses and land.' And then, as he argued, scribbling would not prevent his picking up wealth if it were to be had, for he sat down to write when others either went to sleep or sought recreation; and he found himself far fitter for work after half a night's labour at his desk, than others after half a night's 'idiotical amusement' or flagrant profligacy.

CHAPTER IX.

WAITING FOR THE VERDICT.

WHEN, however, the precious manuscript has been printed, and the work fairly launched, there comes one of the most tantalising — shall we say pleasantly excruciating—intervals which human nature can possibly experience.

Waiting for the verdict is never a time for the display of much composure. Whether the case is one which may result in entitling the expectant to an estate worth a quarter of a million, or in consigning him to the scaffold, suspense is almost intolerable. Must it not therefore be fearfully exciting to a young author, when his fortunes for life, and his credit with posterity, are staked upon the decision? Unless he is one of those who think so highly of their own genius that they cannot entertain the idea of failure in its remotest form, he will wisely consider that it is just possible he may find his readers amongst the class symbolised by Douglas Jerrold in the person of Mr. Goldthumb. This individual, who figures in *Time works Wonders*, being praised by a lady for his surprising acquaintance with books—he appearing to have read everything of modern date—replied, 'Why, ma'am, after working thirty years as a trunk-maker, 'twould be to my shame if I did not know something of the literature of my country.'

This, however, is undoubtedly the fate of much that is written. Trunks have too often been the coffins in which a man's productions have been quietly and unostentatiously interred. It is doubtless hard, but in many cases it cannot well be helped. A poor poet once found on issuing from a provision-shop, where he had done his humble marketing, that his bacon was wrapped up in a sheet of one of his own productions, and his cheese in a page of another! Imagine the *sæva indignatio* with which that man would throw off his next verses, and the rage with which he would devour and endeavour to digest his victuals that evening!

No matter indeed how grand a composition may appear in the producer's own eyes, or to the partial perceptions of his friends—those traditional friends who are incessantly prompting people to publish sermons or poems, to come forward as members of town-councils, or to offer themselves as candidates for Parliament—he, the author, must open his eyes to many dread possibilities besides the one just suggested. He is an unknown writer, and must therefore remember that hundreds of able men have had to languish in obscurity for a long period before their merits could be discovered, whilst hundreds more have owed their recognition at last to circumstances of the most fortuitous description. Very few writers can say of themselves as William Godwin could—that before the publication of his *Political Justice*, he was in possession of some degree of fame for a 'work unfinished and unseen.' It must also be borne in mind that the great question will be, not, whether the production is one of marked ability, but whether it is fitting merchandise for the literary market?—in plain commercial terms, abhorrent to the ethereal mind, Is it an article which will *sell*? Will those leviathan dealers in literature, Mr. Mudie and Mr. W. H. Smith,

take a respectable number of copies, and put them into circulation not only in the metropolitan arteries, but in the provincial veins, until all the literary capillaries of the kingdom are supplied? But above all, what kind of a greeting will it encounter from the redoubtable order of Critics? Will it, he must ask, receive gentle and impartial treatment from competent and therefore courteous judges, or will it be cruelly mangled by the irresponsible Mohawks of the press?

These and many other fearful perils will present themselves with direful force to him who sits in his chamber, self-questioning, self-tormenting, whilst he waits anxiously for the verdict of the public and the press.

Campbell's mood whilst his *Pleasures of Hope* were being launched was sometimes perfectly pitiable. Entering his friend Somerville's apartment one evening, he sat down before the fire without speaking a word, and apparently in as discontented a mood as if he had a little matter to settle with the executioner on the following day. On being bantered about his silence, Somerville remarked by way of excuse that he supposed the poet must be communing with the Muses, and did not like to be disturbed. 'Hang the Muses!' was Campbell's surly and irreverent reply; 'don't talk any more of that nonsense, I beseech you!' His friend then attempted to cheer him by stating that a mutual acquaintance had obtained, by some means or other, a proof-sheet of the poem, and was in high glee at his good fortune. So far from affording any comfort, however, this drew forth an angry confession. 'Supposing,' said the visitor, 'they should all find out one day, as I did this morning, that the thing is neither more nor less than trash, would not the author's predicament be ten-fold worse than if he had never written a line? I assure you that to-day I could not endure to

look at my own work. 'Twas an absolute punishment. There are days,' continued he, 'when I can't abide to walk in the sunshine, and when I would almost rather be shot than come in the sight of any man, or be spoken to by any mortal.'

A caustic lesson this for all poetasters! Here was a poem which secured the writer prompt acceptance as well as permanent reputation, and yet there were times when he regarded it as positive 'trash,' and could not endure the sight or mention of his own production! A curious satire, too, upon the title of the work. To a self-distrustful writer like this, a little encouragement opportunely applied would prove of unspeakable value. The same poet read his glorious 'Hohenlinden' (composed during a period of great mental depression) whilst in manuscript, to Mrs. Dugald Stewart. When finished, the good lady, much moved, rose from her seat, and exclaimed—placing her hand on his head affectionately—'This brow will bear another wreath of laurel yet.' 'The circumstance,' said the poet, 'made a stronger impression on my mind than if she had spoken in a strain of the loftiest panegyric. It was one of the principal events in my life that gave me confidence in my own powers.' Campbell doubtless enjoyed to the full the public homage which he received on his visit to Edinburgh in his later years, when, as he writes, he was 'cheered on coming aboard the steamboats, or into public rooms, and on leaving them;' and when—more delightful still—he saw the windows in Queen Street crowded with ladies who were looking at 'little Solomon in all his glory.'

On the other hand, as a writer may be enticed (or propelled) into print by injudicious friends, so he may suffer from discouragement administered by too candid acquaintances. 'Every single friend, every one,' writes Hans Christian Andersen, 'and

therefore it must be true what they tell me, declares *Agnete*, and everything I have written, to be mediocre.' Darkened by such clouds of criticism, there was no very promising sky overhead for the author, then in his twenty-eighth year or thereabouts. Every 'bitter utterance of the press,' he complains, had been sent to him by his attentive acquaintances, who appeared very anxious that he should drain the cup of disappointment to the dregs. All his hopes he discovered to be 'false bubbles;' all his self-confidence, he declared, had vanished; and whatever heart for fighting or working there might once have been within him had been utterly destroyed! Resenting the treatment he thus received, he abandoned his native country, and determined, if possible, to build up a reputation abroad. In this he succeeded beyond his utmost expectations; so much so that, when he visited England, Dickens went up to town purposely to meet him; and, in writing to the author of the *Fairy Tales*, he observed in his charming way that his house at Gad's-Hill was full of admiring and affectionate friends, from three feet high to five feet nine.

Not even when a man writes for purely benevolent or national purposes can he hope to escape much sharp and ungenerous criticism. When the Irish potato disease was raging in 1846, Mr. Alfred Smee published a treatise on the subject, containing the results of his own inquiries, and discussing the remedies to be adopted. His investigations had been carried on with singular energy and perseverance: he foraged far and wide for samples of the *Aphis* (the insect which was the cause of the pestilence); mounted these on glass for microscopic study, and preserved them for careful reference. He collected samples of the poor stricken tuber itself so diligently that, as his daughter states, 'our drawing-rooms were ornamented with

innumerable specimens of diseased potatoes. Potatoes were on the mantelpiece; potatoes were on the tables; potatoes innumerable were on the floor. I am by no means sure that the chairs were not occupied by potatoes: wherever the eye glanced, diseased potatoes met the view.'

Yet scarcely had the book in question made its appearance, than it was assailed almost as fiercely as if it had contained proposals for exterminating the Irishman's vegetable, and with it, indeed, the whole Irish people. Will it be credited that he received threatening letters by nearly every post, warning him that he would be 'amply punished if he continued to write on the subject'? Whilst on the one hand he was peppered with satirical squibs, on the other hand his very life was menaced as if he had actually imported the insect marauder, or brought over an army of Colorado beetles.[1]

Henry Fothergill Chorley, a musical critic of much note, and the author of a number of well-meaning works, complained that he served as a mark to be shot at by any reckless archer. 'Whenever,' said he groaningly, 'I attempted any appearance in print, I had such a phrase as this sent to me (lest I should fail to see it), "the writer spoke of the Chorleys and Chawbacons of literature." Not merely were such coarse personalities sent to me, but they were righteously forwarded to my family at Liverpool, some of whom they succeeded in troubling greatly.' Was not this a touch of savage humour and of malignant devotion to a bad purpose, which makes it incumbent to express a hope that the offenders have managed to reach heaven spite of everything? 'I kept by me for some years,' proceeds the victim, 'a collection of such flowers of rhetoric, the most exquisite of which was a letter written in very black ink, beginning

[1] *Alfred Smee's Life.* By his Daughter, p. 31.

"You Worm!" I cannot call to mind a writer more largely neglected, sneered at, and grudgingly analysed, than myself.'

Naturally, then, the most formidable of all questions for a young author will be, What treatment is he likely to receive at the hands of the professed critics?

Probably he may have been informed that the path to the Hill of Fame swarms with desperadoes, whose business it is to waylay and maltreat the pilgrims to the Temple of Honour. He has been told how they set upon young Byron, for instance, with intent to crush the life out of him, and how they succeeded (at least as many supposed) in extinguishing poor Keats' vital spark altogether. He has been given to understand that to take this road is like the going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, but with very little chance of being succoured by any good Samaritan if he should find himself bruised and fainting by the wayside.

Perhaps the aspirant has encountered some veteran of the quill who has terrified him by a vivid account of his own sufferings, telling him after the fashion, and probably in the very language, of the great Apostle, how that he had been in perils oft, both from Jew and Gentile; how that, though now a fully accredited citizen of the Republic of Letters, a Roman of the Romans, yet more than thrice he had been beaten with the rods of the weekly Critics; more than five times he had received forty stripes from the monthly castigators without their sparing him the supernumerary cut in a single instance; and how that, worst of all, he had been repeatedly stoned by the great Quarterly Reviewers, and left for dead on the ground. In fact, the aspirant may well tremble when he hears the narrator protest that he should certainly have suffered total shipwreck in his prospects at the very outset, had he not possessed an

indomitable will, and had not Heaven mercifully, perhaps miraculously, interposed for his protection. Is it any wonder if, receiving such alarming information, the young author, unless invulnerable in his own conceit, is apt to regard the ordeal as fully equivalent to the old practice of walking across heated ploughshares, or the more modern treat of running the gauntlet between a double row of merciless men?

Now the office of critic is unquestionably one of the most useful, and may be one of the most honourable, a mortal can fill. Let a man take up his pen with a full conviction that it is his business to guide and advise the public as to the books they should read; that it is his duty to the author to deliver a faithful judgment upon the merits of the work he undertakes to review; and that, above all and beyond all, it is necessary to bring his conscience to the task as well as his knowledge and ability; and from such a writer a fair and honest verdict may be expected. The ideal critic is a person divested of all self, and of all the individualities of passion, just as an angel is a spirit divested of all frail and corruptible flesh. He is a man who can take a thought or a fact without considering from what source it comes, or under what circumstances it is presented; and this he can do without importing his own personality into the inquiry or allowing it to interfere with the conclusions which justice and truthfulness require him to pronounce. Most significantly, if somewhat sarcastically, it has been remarked that any one who takes up the critical pen should have 'a mind at leisure from itself.' Still more severely, it has been suggested that a perfect critic implies a perfect mortal, and therefore a perfect marvel in the flesh.

But however this may be, could we not effect a neat little revolution in the Republic of Letters by a simple expedient?

Suppose that every critic, before he proceeded to exercise his art, were to swear himself in, as it were, in something like the following form: 'I hereby solemnly and sincerely declare that I will well and truly try every book which may be placed before me for review; that I will deal with its merits as prominently as with its defects; that I will not allow any prejudice or personal feeling to affect my judgment; that I will set down nothing in malice or wantonness; that I will regard it as my duty to act as a judge, and not to hold a brief as an advocate or an adversary; that I will be particularly cautious in my conclusions when my digestion is bad, or my liver is out of order, or my gall is unduly obstructed; in short, that on all occasions I will take scrupulous care to conduct every inquiry with perfect impartiality, and a true verdict give according to the evidence. So help me Heaven!' Would any honourable reviewer object to take this pledge? and, if universally accepted and observed, should we not all say that the literary millennium had at last arrived?

Let us thank our stars that there are good and honest critics who, without being required to kiss the book by the crier, act upon the principles just enunciated, and practise their art in a noble and even chivalrous fashion, striving to give no pain where it can be possibly avoided, and seeking to afford all commendation and encouragement where it can be conscientiously bestowed. To such men—true guardians of our literature and trusty guides of the Great Public—all honour is justly due, and to them all confidence may safely be awarded.

That there are temptations to abuse this office is simply to say that critics are unfortunately human, that they have minds which are fallible, stomachs which are apt to be troublesome, tempers which are not necessarily heavenly, and sometimes aversions which may be as difficult to explain as that of which

poor Dr. Fell was the butt in a recent age, and Sabidius in the times of the Roman Martial.[1]

Even in case of a distinguished Rhadamanthus like Macaulay, we have from his own pen a display of studied injustice, and a revelation of vindictiveness which are lamentably significant. Writing to a friend respecting a speech of Croker's in Parliament, which had galled him by its point, he observes savagely, 'See whether I do not dust that varlet's jacket for him in the next number of the *Blue and Yellow!* I detest him more than cold boiled beef.' In plain English, this was as much as to say, 'The next time I take my seat in the Court of Criticism, I will totally forget that I am a judge, and as such bound to administer justice between the suitor and the public; and I will make the occasion an opportunity for indulging my malice against the man who has affronted me in another place, and in respect of a totally different matter.' Is it any wonder if less prominent critics, writing in all the plenitude of secrecy, should occasionally forget the obligations of office, and the claims of fair-play, when these could be so flagrantly repudiated by so great an authority as Thomas Babington Macaulay?

But if, unhappily, our newly-fledged author should fall into the hands of the Philistines of the press, he will scarcely encounter such a ferocious condemnation as Douglas Jerrold passed upon his friend Thackeray. 'I hear,' observed the latter, 'that you have said the *Virginians* is the worst book I have written?' 'No,' replied Douglas, 'I said it was the worst book anybody ever wrote.'

Still more, the young writer may do something towards preserving the tranquillity of his soul, by reflecting on a very

[1] Non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare:
Hoc tantum possum dicere, non amo te.—*Martial*, Lib. 1. Ep. 33.

few simple considerations. Many writers soon become quite case-hardened in regard to criticism. Some even take a cheerful view of persecution, and probably pray for their tormentors, beseeching the Powers above to open their eyes to the merits of the works they review. Some, again, have been known to keep scrap-books containing notices of their productions; bravely inserting the evil as well as the good, and with marvellous magnanimity—perhaps with caustic candour—doing as much honour to foe as to friend. Mr. Yates tells us that, on visiting Mr. Tupper, he found that the author of *Proverbial Philosophy* had a large volume in which he kept cuttings, containing critiques upon his works. Amongst these, was a flippant one, written by Mr. Yates himself, and which, greatly to his embarrassment, he observed had been identified as his, by a minute in the handwriting of his host.

So the young candidate for honour may call to mind how often the very aristarchs of literature have been deceived, and their verdicts reversed, not only by posterity but by the contemporary public itself. It would have been a sorry day for Wordsworth and Coleridge, had they accepted the notorious verdict, 'This will never do,' as conclusive of their poetical merits. So miserable was the reception accorded to the *Lyrical Ballads*, in consequence, that when Cottle, the publisher, sold his various copyrights to the eminent firm of Longmans, this particular one was not even deemed worthy of appraisement. It was, therefore, returned to the writers, as if there was no coin in the British currency poor enough to do it reverence, and as if a handful of African cowries would have been too handsome a guerdon for the men who were silently effecting a revolution in the poetry of the age. But when, after the lapse of some years, the work was reproduced, its success was as marked as its failure had been

discouraging. 'This *will* do,' said the public, who bought, and read, and approved what it had previously been instructed to reject with disdain.

It would have left a large blank in our literature, if the most brilliant and sensational bard of his day had meekly submitted to the assurance of an early critic, that, 'Though George Gordon, Lord Byron, a minor, may be a gentleman, an orator, or a statesman; unless he improves wonderfully, he can never be a poet.'

That strange character Antoine Joseph Wiertz, the Belgian artist, played a pleasant little trick upon the Parisian painters and connoisseurs. He borrowed a painting of Rubens's, a genuine well-ascertained production of that great artist, and, having subscribed his own name in a corner, forwarded it to Paris for exhibition. To the infinite amusement of himself and his fellow-conspirators, it was refused a place in the collection, and declared a miserable daub! It is easy to imagine how Wiertz chuckled over this verdict, and what was the dismay of the Parisian judges, when they found they had been condemning the production of one of the princes of art.[1]

Nor, on the other hand, should the aspirant be ignorant of Winckelman's judgment upon a painting of Ganymede and Jupiter, which was supposed to have been found at Herculaneum, or, at any rate, had made its appearance in some mysterious way. 'Beyond doubt,' said Winckelman, 'it is the finest thing in the whole world.' This, from the greatest art critic of the day, was prodigious praise. But, alas, it turned out to be not an antique, but the work of his own friend and contemporary Mengs!

Indeed, it is a very significant fact, that, had the first opinion

[1] *The Art Journal*, Nov. 1869, p. 350.

of critics and publishers always been regarded as final, the world would have lost some of its most meritorious works. Possibly we might go further, and say that if, accepting the verdict of their judges, the writers had renounced literature, and turned their energies into other channels, scarcely a single *opus magnum* would be found upon the earth. Strike out every production, indeed, of which the MS. has been carried wearily from door to door, or 'declined with thanks,' and our libraries would be thinned into mere skeleton collections.

Not that these literary officials are always amenable to reproach. Booksellers, especially, have a perfect right to look at the divinest composition with a commercial eye. The question for them is naturally, What value will a work possess in the market? Is it likely to succeed pecuniarily? They are a body of respectable craftsmen, earning their living upon principles of trade economy, and not a sworn band of philanthropists, whose duty it is to lose money for the benefit of struggling authors. It would, therefore, be unfair to launch maledictions at their heads, as if they were in anywise responsible for the fortunes of their customers, and ought to stand sponsors for every applicant who had his reputation yet to make.

To a young author it may also be some consolation to reflect upon the diversity of opinion, which is frequently exhibited amongst the Rhadamanths of the press. If he were to take the substance of fifty critiques upon the same work, and arrange these in parallel columns, would he not find the most conflicting and irreconcilable views expressed? The book on your table may be lauded by one journal as the finest production of the times, and denounced by another as the most arrant trash ever penned. Miss Mitford mentions two individuals who, in criticising a certain work, declared, the one of them, that it ought

to be burnt by the hangman, and the other, that it should be printed in letters of gold: 'My sentiments,' adds she, 'accord with neither; I would only send it to the pastry-cook and the trunk-maker.'[1] If doctors were in the habit of uttering as diverse judgments upon a disorder as Cardinal Mazarin's physicians did, one declaring the seat of the malady to be the lungs, another the liver, the third the spleen, and the fourth the mesentery, what measure of trust would the public accord to the Faculty?

Landor makes one of his imaginary colloquists declare that 'we have about a million of critics in Great Britain, not a soul of whom entertains the least doubt of his own infallibility.' This, of course, is a playful exaggeration, but it must be allowed that diversity of opinion becomes inadmissible just in proportion as authority is claimed, and certitude is assumed. If there were fifty Popes in the world each asserting his own inability to err, what should we say if we found them expressing dissonant views on any article of faith, and each affirming, or at any rate suggesting, that all the others must necessarily be wrong?

Nor is the public itself less fallible than critics or publishers. *Don Quixote* was a work which might have been expected to take the popular fancy at once. The most illiterate muleteer listening to it at the humblest venta, though incapable of appreciating the subtile satire involved, could have enjoyed the fun which threw the more intelligent into paroxysms of laughter. Yet this world's-book was at first received without a cheer or even a word of welcome: indeed, it was scouted and abused by many, and it was not until the author adopted the expedient of publishing an anonymous critique upon his production, in which he explained its object, and gave it a sort of personal bearing,

[1] *Mitford's Life*, vol. iii. p. 184.

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that it shot into popularity and became one of the standard favourites of mankind.

Hundreds of illustrations indeed might be given. Public favour is so uncertain, its conditions are so equivocal, its tenure so precarious, that the sedatest calculations may be entirely at fault. Anthony Trollope, who has certainly been a well-accepted writer, put the judgment of the reading community to a curious test in his own person. Nearly twenty years after he commenced his career as a novelist, he wrote a story namelessly in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and followed it up by another, both being, as he supposed, of fair merit; but neither of them had 'any real success;' and when he offered a third the sagacious publisher actually declined it altogether. Meanwhile the author was growing in fame and fortune in his own name; yet he found that the product of the same brain was powerless to create, as he had hoped, a 'second identity' for himself. He discovered that it would be necessary to run through all the routine of service before he could win his spurs in this collateral character; whereas if he had laid these experimental products before the public as his own acknowledged compositions they would doubtless have been received with the usual three times three, and perhaps 'one over.'

There have been several curious cases in medical story in which afflicted individuals have suffered from alternating states of consciousness, and in a certain sense have had the equivocal privilege of living two independent lives. In these instances, however, the intellect undergoes some modification on each transition, and the patient remembers or forgets in turn what is incident to each particular state. But in Mr. Trollope's case the two conditions of authorship, though concurrent, were kept painfully distinct, and the gulf appeared impassable.

Possibly, however, the author may have to reckon with a still sterner and more captious critic. This may be himself.

On the title-page of an early dramatic production of Charles Reade, he wrote and left written, with his authenticating initials, the word 'Bosh! bosh!! bosh!!!' What could surpass the coarse candour of Johnson's judgment upon his own play of *Irene*, when told that a gentleman of the name of Pott had pronounced it the finest tragedy of modern times? Then, replied he, 'if Pott says so, Pott lies.' Not even the courtesy which dictated the compliment could conciliate Ursa Major, and induce him to decline the flattery in civil terms. Probably he thought, as he remarked to Hannah More, that people ought to consider what their praise is worth, before they offered it; but at any rate, after hearing of this sledge-hammer blow at his veracity, poor Pott would not be likely to speak in high terms of *Irene* again. He might, indeed, be disposed to parody the dilemma of the old Greek sophist, and argue, 'If I lie when I say this drama is unrivalled, then I lie when I speak the truth; but if I say that it is a mediocre production, then I speak the truth when I really lie.'

The Ettrick Shepherd tells us that, after the first ebullition of gratified vanity had subsided, he discovered that his early verses were all 'sad stuff,' and in a few days he had sufficient judgment to wish his publication heartily 'at the devil.' Time rolled on, and he earnestly hoped that the work stood 'consigned to eternal oblivion;' but in his later years, whilst in London, shedding his eccentric light upon the literary circles of the metropolis, a malicious critic managed to get hold of a copy and brought it before the public, with large quotations, to the poor bard's intense chagrin. 'At the devil?' 'Yes, most heartily,' quoth he.

Southey's vexation may be imagined when he—then a grave, cautious, mature writer, an ardent defender of Church and Crown—discovered that his wild revolutionary poem *Wat Tyler*, written upwards of twenty-three years before, had been surreptitiously published. To say nothing of the fraudulent manner in which the MS. had been acquired, this was a cruel, ungenerous deed, and indicated as malevolent a spirit as if the conspirators had raked up a long repented, and wholly obsolete, sin of youth against some holy man whose days were now devoted to deeds of piety. The author applied for protection to the Court of Chancery, but the 'stable-door' could not be closed until many thousand *Wat Tylers* had ridden forth on their mischievous errand under the sanction of Southey's venerated name. Taunted frequently, as he was, with this early escapade, he endeavoured to cover it in some degree, wittily, though not very logically, by asserting that he was no more ashamed of having been a republican than of having been a boy. Like the Shepherd, however, he would gladly have sent the work to Satan, could he have suppressed it in time.

On the other hand, the criticisms of authors upon their own productions have sometimes been more remarkable for their frankness than for their modesty.

Niebuhr thought so highly of his works that he said, 'He who refuses respect to my History deserves none himself.' For, remarked he, 'if ever a human being existed, so persuaded of the correctness and truth of his view of the world that he would stake his life upon it, I am that man. I know that I see truly as I know that I exist.'[1]

Fuseli, being asked what he thought might be the value of

[1] *Life and Letters of Bartholomew George Niebuhr*, by Susanna Winkworth, vol. ii. pp. 67, 237.

all the paintings at the current Exhibition of the Academy, coolly set them down at five hundred guineas. 'Only five hundred guineas!' exclaimed the astonished querist. 'Yes,' replied the artist, 'I have only one picture there, and I think it worth that sum.'

There is such a thing as a quarto opinion of one's self. 'Davy,' said Wordsworth, at a large party, calling to the great chemist from the top of the table, and arresting the attention of the company by the solemnity of the summons, 'do you know the reason why I published the *White Doe* in quarto?' 'No, what was it?' asked the unsuspecting Davy. 'Why, it was to show the world my own opinion of it.' Suppose that authors could conveniently express their estimate of their own productions in this particular fashion, should we not have a large number of our works produced in imperial and elephant folio?

Of self-opinions in an imperial form many illustrations might be quoted. The elder Dionysius of Syracuse fancied he surpassed all other mortals as a poet, and when Philoxenus candidly denied his superlative merits the mortified sovereign sent the poor man to the Latomiæ or stone quarries, to expiate his honest criticisms by hard, though, as it happened, not very lengthy, labour. Nero, it is well known, imagined that he was an unrivalled master of music. He had, indeed, carried off the prizes at all the Grecian games from obsequious judges, and in his dying hours found time to pity the world for losing such a performer. But would the most audacious critic, sitting in the seat of the scorner, and writing in the plenitude of irresponsible power, have felt himself at liberty, had he been a Roman, to make merry over the puny voice and ridiculous mouthings of the Lord of many Legions?

In the matter of self-criticism, it would be difficult to find a

rival to Mr. John Neal, the American novelist, who declares himself to have written matter enough for a hundred octavo volumes at the least. The mingled candour and complacency displayed by this author in his notices of his own books (as reported by Mr. Alibone) is rich beyond compare. *Keep Cool*, his first production, was, as he admits, a 'disgrace to literature.' *Errata*, says the impartial parent, is 'a powerful work loaded with rubbish.' *Randolph* affords him the opportunity of complimenting himself upon his intrepidity; for, remarks he, it is 'about as courageous a book as ever was, or ever will be written; full of truth, alarming truth, to the great men of America. It struck them with consternation. It is a novel, a plausible, well connected, finely developed novel.' *Seventy-Six* draws out a more emphatic eulogium: 'I pronounce this to be one of the best romances of the age: the story is told with astonishing vivacity.'

Another of his novels, it seems, is of so fearful a character that it ought to be approached with the utmost caution, like some tremendous fulminate of extremely ticklish composition; or some prankish powder magazine which may go off at any moment. '*Logan*,' says Mr. Neal again, 'is so outrageously overdone that nobody can read it entirely through. Parts are without a parallel for passionate beauty. It should be taken as people take opium; a grain may exhilarate, more may stupify, much will be death.' Was it not kind of the author to warn novel-readers against the murderous properties of this book, and to advise them, with unexampled frankness, that it was sufficient to take one grain—just one, because two might strip them of their senses, and half-a-dozen bring them under the criticism of the coroner? But Mr. Neal's notice of his own poems, published at first under the name of

Jehu O. Cataract, and of a tragedy entitled *Otho*, is still more remarkable for its startling censure on the one hand, and its uncircumscribed panegyric on the other. These, said he, 'are works abounding throughout in absurdity, intemperance, affectation, extravagance, with continual but involuntary imitation, yet nevertheless containing altogether more sincere poetry, more exalted, original, pure, bold poetry than all the works of all other authors that have appeared in America. A volume could be collected out of the whole, which would contain as much great poetry as any single volume of this age. A few passages are equal to any poetry that ever was written.' To comprehend a mind like this, is wellnigh impracticable. His critiques upon himself involve irreconcilable contradictions. That a man should exaggerate his own merits, and discover beauties where others can only discern defects, is unfortunately too common an occurrence, but that he should at the same time be so wonderfully alive to his own demerits, is totally at variance with all ordinary experience of human nature. It is just as if a person had one eye which could only see in the dark, and the other in the light; or one optic which did duty as a telescope, whilst the other was available only as a microscope. For his marvellous candour, Mr. Neal is entitled to all credit, but one thing is obvious, namely, that an author who could, to his own knowledge and with a full conviction of the fact, offer books to the world which were full of 'rubbish,' or which abounded with 'absurdities and other extravagances,' must have been sadly deficient in his sense of duty to the public as well as to himself.

But before quitting the subject of criticism, it may not be amiss to advert to one terrible bugbear which occasionally afflicts the candidate for glory. This is the idea of a conspiracy. The play-writer discovers that the managers have combined to reject

his pieces ; the essayist that the conductors of periodicals are in collusion with each other to exclude his contributions ; and the new poet that the reviewers have met somewhere and decided to condemn without mercy everything he writes. He sees evidences of a plot on every hand, and regards himself as the victim of some unexampled villainy. It is likely also that he wonders why Heaven should permit such foul machinations to prosper instead of frustrating the conspirators and confounding all their knavish tricks.

Now it is a great pity to waste much time over this bugbear. Generally speaking, it has no foundation in fact. Publishers critics, managers, have too little in common to induce them to band together for the suppression of any particular individual. They are not sufficiently gregarious to join even in the choicest bit of malignity. No editor, for instance, would dream of sending round a circular to his brethren to inform them that he had declined a paper by Mr. Horace Sparkins without thanks, and to request that they would treat that aspiring individual with equal severity. Want of judgment these officials may sometimes display ; but if they think that any good can be got out of an author, or that his writings may be handled with advantage, they will not be likely to throw away a chance, especially for the sake of indulging purely wanton spite.

But even should such be the case, it is open to the author, if the true metal is in him, to score a glorious revenge over his adversaries by disproving their censures and nobly writing them down. This is at once elegant retribution and charming self-vindication. Must it not be a fine spectacle to see a once derided author come dashing along in his triumphal car, scattering his calumniators right and left, and riding victoriously down to posterity with some of his fiercest persecutors trailing in the dust at his chariot wheels?

CHAPTER X.

THE VERDICT.

AT length comes the verdict. That is always a trying moment for the person principally concerned; but it is specially so when the triers have the privilege of declaring you to be an ass, or an angel, or any other intermediate creature, at their own goodwill and pleasure.

The decision may, of course, be unfavourable. It is just possible even that there may be sufficient unanimity amongst critics—a virtue attainable, perhaps, when the purpose is to dispraise—to ensure something like a chorus of condemnation.

There is one thing, however, which is worse than adverse criticism, and that is utter silence on the part of the oracles of the press. Vigorous abuse has often brought a writer into repute, and under most circumstances it naturally draws attention and invites perusal.

But to a youthful author it is galling in the extreme to be let severely alone. He considers himself grossly insulted by a silent disclaimer of his presence as if he were a viewless creature who counted for nothing in the system of things. 'The Public,' said one of our most popular essayists in regard to his earliest productions, 'never do me justice: whenever I write anything, they make it a point to know nothing about it.'

Now there are two ways of dealing with a disappointment. The first is to go into the sulks and cut off your nose in order

to spite your face; the second is to look Fortune boldly in the countenance, as Jean Paul did, and burst into a loud defiant laugh. There is indeed a medium course which may be pursued, as it was by Charles Lamb, when his farce 'Mr. H——' was unmistakably condemned. 'We are pretty stout about it,' wrote he with characteristic frankness, 'and have had plenty of condoling friends; but after all, we had *rather* that it had succeeded.'

Condolences, it is true, however well meant in such cases, have always a stinging element in them, and however gallantly a man may bear up under a reverse, the consoler is apt to report (as the best that can be said of the patient) that he is doing as well as can be expected. How Goldsmith felt tempted to pursue the first of the courses just suggested, he tells us in his own delightful fashion. 'I was once induced to show my indignation against the public by discontinuing my efforts to please, and was bravely resolved, like Raleigh, to vex them by burning my manuscripts in a passion.' Here we have a naïve expression of the charming deceit under which so many youthful writers labour—namely, that they are toiling purely for the entertainment of mankind; that they have a right to feel aggrieved if their efforts are not hailed with a round of applause and a liberal collection in cash; that, failing a speedy recognition of their talents, they will be entitled to take their revenge by depriving the human race of all their precious productions; and that further they will be justified in marking their displeasure by giving the coroner a melancholy piece of business to transact. But, continued the simple-hearted Oliver, 'upon reflection, I considered what sort or body of people would be displeased by my rashness.' This was a very sobering question. It was just what common sense would ask, and what common

modesty would promptly answer. 'The sun,' pursued he, 'after so sad an accident, might shine next morning as usual; men might laugh and transact business as before, and not a single creature feel any regret but myself. Instead of having Apollo in mourning, or the Muses in a fit of spleen; instead of having the learned world apostrophising at my untimely decease, perhaps all Grub Street might laugh at my fate, and self-approving dignity be unable to shield me from ridicule.' Very sensibly and sedately argued!

Charles Nodier, that remarkably versatile Frenchman, published a volume, in which he assured the world that if it persisted in disregarding his literary merits—as till then it had shamefully done—he would infallibly punish it by committing suicide. It is comforting to know that the blood of that man does not rest upon the head of the public: he lived, wrote, became famous, and died at an excellent old age, fully reconciled, it is believed, to the human race. James Fenimore Cooper, whose numerous writings were largely read and liberally remunerated, once conveyed a strong hint to mankind that if his productions were not treated with still more respect he would stop his supplies of intellectual sunshine, and leave the planet in comparative darkness. The poet Collins, whose fingers swept the lyre with such magic skill, and whose fervid fancy set the passions to music, was at first totally neglected. He resented the indignity so highly that when some property was left him he bought up all his poems and consigned them to the flames. The world would not now willingly part with his pensive murmuring odes—the wind sighing through them like a sweet dying zephyr; but it must be admitted that we should have scrambled through the centuries in some fashion or other even had they been entirely lost.

Walter Savage Landor offered his *Count Julian* to Murray for publication, and was willing, so he told Southey, to accept half-a-dozen copies as his only reward. This proposal was declined. The author then undertook to bear the expenses himself, but the great bookseller refused. Vexed, as the self-willed poet might well be, what course did he adopt to express his displeasure? He straightway went to his desk and took out a tragedy, *Ferranti and Giulio*, which he committed to the flames! Off went part of his nose to spite his face. Writing to Southey about the transaction, he remarks, 'I am resolved that never verse of mine hereafter shall be committed to anything else.' And thereupon he professes that he had formally closed his literary career! Imagine a great brawny man, overflowing with energy and boisterous spirits, playing the petted baby, and thrusting his toys into the fire because some one had sneered at his Noah's Ark or spoken disrespectfully of his rocking-horse! He, of course, was the only sufferer by his own petulance. The publisher must have laughed when he heard of this act of infantile revenge. The author of *Thalaba* would be unable to repress a smile at his friend's folly. The public, instead of shedding a tear over the catastrophe, would chuckle over it with intense relish, and reflect that what it then knew of Landor was simply the title of his *Gebir*, which De Quincey said no mortal man had ever read through except Southey and himself.

Yet this was the individual who observed, with superb arrogance, in the preface to the last-named poem, 'Such is my indifference that, when once I have written anything, I never inquire for it afterwards.' 'Why, then, did he write?' it will be asked: why, still more, did he publish; and why, most of all, did he complain if the *canaille* of creation, as he deemed the public

treated the work with an indifference equal to his own, or even made fun of its suggestive title?[1]

The German Von Kleist destroyed his manuscript tragedy of *Robert Guiscard*, his favourite production, once, twice, thrice, if not four times; and yet with perverse energy reproduced it on every occasion. He seemed to have a passion for literary self-murder, as if shadowing forth the double suicide which he may be said to have committed in the flesh.

Some there are, indeed, who are quite unfitted by nature to make head against disappointment. It is not for them to take fortune's buffetings with patient endurance, still less to receive them in a spirit of hopeful serenity. With such, Life's great game is soon played out. Whether from want of manly fibre, or from the presence of special sensitiveness of nerve—from fiery impatience of delay, or from swift collapse of purpose—they break down before they have made any marked progress in the race for distinction. Of this class was Gerald Griffin, the author of *Gisippus*, *The Collegians*, and the *Munster Festivals*. From Limerick, a youth of nineteen, he went to London. It was of course to carve his way to fortune. He had poems in his pocket, novels in his brain, but, as usual, little in his purse. Like many before him, like many after him, he paced those delusive streets, only to find them paved with sharp stones, which pierced his feet until blood (unseen by the busy crowd) stained almost every step. He offered his poems to one bookseller after another, but these functionaries could scarcely be expected to buy from a stripling who had no name with which they could conjure. His *Gisippus*, written on slips of paper, for the most part in coffee-houses, could find no customer until, after some time—unhappily too late—it attracted the attention of

[1] *Lord Houghton's Monograms*, p. 84.

Macready. Meanwhile he sought employment on periodicals, or as a journeyman writer; but Griffin was not the man to face stern looks or abrupt refusals. His pride was equal to his poverty. It was not that he simply shrank from a patron as he would have done from a bailiff or an executioner, but he recoiled from the hand of friendship, when stretched out to relieve him, as if it were about to deal a blow rather than confer a benefit. Banim found him on one occasion in a wretched attic, where he had been shut up for three days without food, his dignity being too great to accept any assistance from his landlady, and his family name being considered so sacred that he kept a stock of *aliases* for purposes of concealment.

Poor Griffin's energy was not by any means commensurate with his ambition. Before he had given himself a fair chance in the arena of authorship, and without waiting to see the upgrowth of the seed he had sown, he vanished from the scene, and buried himself alive in an ecclesiastical fraternity. There he learnt to look upon his novels as criminal productions, and his play of *Gisippus*—a noble lesson of virtue in a dramatic form—as the result of inspiration from below. Burning all his manuscripts he resolved to write no more. No coroner, of course, could be called in; but when a man deliberately undoes, or seeks to undo, all he has spent his foregone days in accomplishing, can we regard him in any other light than that of a moral *felo-de-se*? 'Griffin,' says Mr. S. C. Hall, who knew him personally, and who had a well-earned right to speak on such a subject, 'was simply a coward in the battle of life. He had suffered privations and disappointments, but who has obtained lofty distinction without them? These were his only pangs, and when hope altogether left him he sought escape in solitude and ascetic gloom. Victory was almost within his reach, and he knew it to be so: he gave in

when he might have run the race that was set before him, to arrive in triumph at the goal, and to wear the crown he could have worn.'

Nor is it at all impossible that failure in the aspirant's early attempts will break the charm with which a lofty fancy has invested life. There comes a time indeed in the experience of every thoughtful soul, when the real must be brought into vivid collision with the ideal, and when the imagination finds itself pitted against the stern necessities of fact. It is a painful hour when the dream of years dissolves, and the dreamer discovers that the world is not enchanted ground full of murmuring streams, by the side of which he may saunter at will, or of magic arbours, where he may slumber without fear of molestation from man or fiend ; but that, on the contrary, it is a terrible battle-field, where he must be prepared to fight every inch of his way, or allow himself to be trampled under foot in the deadly rush for money, for place, or distinction. To none it is given to say in reality,

> 'My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
> As if life's business were a summer mood ;
> As if all needful things would come unsought,
> To genial faith still rich in genial good.'

There is a very grand way of looking at life, which commends itself particularly to young and unsophisticated minds. But, charming as it undoubtedly is, it labours under one signal disadvantage, namely, that it is wholly untrue to fact. The theory is that men are angels by nature, or may be converted into such by the example and exhortations of the youthful dreamer ; that the world ought to be a Paradise, and may be changed into such by a little dexterous management on the part of the visionary ; and that virtue, honour, industry, self-denial,

and so forth, are principles which only need to be preached by volunteer apostles like himself, to ensure their universal acceptance. He thinks, if he does not always say,—

> 'Of old things, all are over old,
> Of good things, none are good enough ;
> We'll show that we can help to frame
> A world of other stuff.'

Genius, however, does not always imply judgment. It was remarked of the elder Mirabeau that he had imagination enough for twelve men, but not common sense enough for one. Mr. Horace Greeley, said Secretary Seward, 'is an exceedingly clever man, but he wants common sense ; if he had a little of this, we should be compelled to hang him.'

Still less does it involve the possession of experience. Shelley went over to Dublin when he was scarcely out of his minority, to do something wonderful for poor Erin. As limited in his political knowledge as a child, and as helpless too in its practical application, he published an *Address to the Irish Public*, containing proposals for an association, which was to regenerate the entire nation ! The tin trumpet of the youthful bard, shrill as its notes were at best on such subjects, must have sounded ludicrously feeble when contrasted with the brassy clangour of a genuine agitator's throat. But imagine Percy Bysshe made Viceroy of Ireland, and set to solve the problem which has hitherto baffled statesmen of every party ! Can we indulge in a wilder supposition ? Can we doubt but that in a few months the Emerald Isle would have plunged into some romantic revolution which would have doubled, and perhaps indefinitely multiplied, her woes ?

Very different was the purpose, and infinitely more amiable

was the spirit, which actuated those ambitious youths, Southey, Coleridge, and Lovell, when they established a little Paradise of their own—on paper. Far from the old worn-out hemisphere with its maddening crowds; deep in the sequestered vales of the romantic Susquehanna, where all was peace and plenty, they proposed to found a little Eden into which no serpent could enter, where none of the wiles of civilisation could follow, and whence all the sorrows of artificial society should be banished. It was to be a grand compromise between earth and heaven. Body and soul were to meet on frank and equitable terms. Two hours devoted to toil each day were all that would be required according to the best calculations to satisfy the physical needs of the inhabitants, whilst the remainder would be available for lofty speculations, for intellectual pursuits, and for happy innocent dreams. As if all men were Southeys, Coleridges, and Lovells!

But one question naturally arises. Of all the Edens which have been laid out by ardent enthusiasts, of all the Arcadias which have been designed by sanguine speculators, where is one to be found? If a single specimen exists, travellers ought to have the chance of visiting it: cheap excursions ought to be arranged, and Mr. Cook should be engaged to conduct us personally to the blissful spot.

But however amiable may be these views of human perfectibility, the contrast between fancy and fact is so tremendous, the difference between man potential and man practical is so outrageous, that it is impossible to refrain from a laugh at the supreme verdancy of people who project schemes and elaborate philosophies which are applicable only to a planet where purses are never stolen, where debtors always discharge their obligations to the day, where social rivalries are totally unknown, and

where every man is willing to go without his dinner, rather than permit one of his fellow-creatures to feed meagrely on a crust. Nor will it help the matter to argue that it is more charitable to form a lofty opinion of human nature, and so give ourselves credit for excessive generosity in our views, at the expense of truth. The question is simply, What is the fact? Can we dispense, for instance, with bolts and bars to our doors? Shall a man be allowed to pick your pocket if he has a chance; or, if he borrows your money, ought he to be indulged in any excuse for confiscating it for his own benefit? In such cases it is not of the slightest use to mince matters: to say that such an individual is honest, would be simply to utter a lie, and to trust to his honour would be to act like an ass. If a person with a million at his disposal were to offer to play the confidence trick with every individual he met, say with mankind at large, how much would he have left in a week? In four-and-twenty hours the simpleton would be utterly insolvent.

In many instances these credulous visions are the indications of a complaint which may be called, Inflammation of the organ of self-esteem. The patient sees (as no one can fail to do) that the world wants reforming; but he labours under the delusion that the Reformer has actually arrived; that this Reformer is no other than himself; and that a few vigorous blasts from his ram's-horn will probably suffice to level the walls of all obnoxious institutions, and wind up the long reign of misery and misrule.

Sometimes, too, disappointment may assume a still more questionable form. The baffled one concludes that the world is not worthy of him. His is an exceptional soul! His tastes and talents and aspirations are infinitely superior to those of the ordinary herd! His nature is too aristocratically organised to

endure the wear and tear of a vulgar existence like ours! Would it be too audacious to imagine the soliloquy such a one would utter, if he felt at liberty to express his feelings in plain unvarnished terms? If Conscience could turn out stenographic reports for the public eye, what revelations indeed should we have in such cases! For example:—'What! sent here!—planet No. 3 (if not four) in the solar system!' the murmurer would exclaim: 'There must be some mistake! Clearly I have been misdirected—despatched to the wrong locality! I feel like a person who has been intended for a palace, and finds himself in a menagerie. It is clear that I could not be designed to mate with such swine and donkeys as I see all around me. To say the least of it, this is a horridly shopkeeping world. It is nearly all counter and wharf. Its most precious bit of furniture is its till, and its most popular deity is the almighty Dollar! In fact, I consider it a positive insult to have been sent here at all. I don't know who, or what, is at fault, but there has been a terrible blunder somewhere!'—Probably there are souls who would see little difficulty in applying to themselves Pope's hyperbolical remark on Bolingbroke, that his lordship had got by mistake into the wrong world, and that the great comet of the day had come to convey him to more dignified quarters.

Failing the appearance of that chariot of fire, however, is it any wonder that there should have been youths who in the plenitude of their conceit have resolved to release themselves from their vulgar environment, and to punish the world by depriving it of their priceless presence and inestimable services? The latter idea is a specially piquant element in the case; and, sad as it may be to say it, there can be little doubt but that this revengeful sentiment has prompted many a fatal leap, and drawn many a suicidal trigger.

Even the calm and august Goethe suffered slightly from the disorder in his youthful days. With a sort of dandyism in his arrangements, he selected a valuable and highly polished dagger which he placed by his bedside every night. There it lay conveniently. If the impulse should come upon him suddenly, no time need be lost in carrying it into execution. Courage sometimes cools if you have to get up in your night-gown, and proceed in the dark to find a weapon, or load a pistol, or uncork a phial of poison. With a poniard at your side, the transaction may take place in bed, and this without any risk (as some humourists might possibly observe) of catching cold. The author of *Werther*, however, had the good sense to try a few experiments just to see how he would like it. On retiring to his chamber, before extinguishing the light he would sometimes press the dagger against his skin, in the region of his heart, with a view to produce a slight puncture. Fortunately he found that this was not a relishable operation, and that a dig of the requisite depth would be eminently disagreeable. A few trials soon satisfied him that a death of this description was a dirty process, and that it would be more manly to live and fight the world, than cravenly to take to his heels and rush he knew not where.

The special feature, in short, in all these cases, may be best expressed in the anecdote of the rustic divine, who, in describing the remonstrant attitude of the old missionary prophet to Nineveh, informed the audience that 'Jonah took the pet, and fell out with the Lord.' So the disconcerted ones go into the sulks, and fall out with the powers, celestial as well as terrestrial, as if both had done them intolerable wrong!

Their grievance is, as Mrs. Oliphant graphically puts it in relation to Byron and Shelley, when these self-exiled poets were

nursing their wrath on the banks of Lake Leman, 'in company with their respective mistresses, that heaven and earth had objected to let them have their own way; that, and little more.'

Fortunately, if the patient lives sufficiently long, this period of romance and discontent may have its end. Its length will depend much upon his judgment and powers of observation. Half-a-dozen years, we might suppose, would be quite sufficient to convince any sensible mortal that he could scarcely expect to be located in an Arcadia where shepherds always pipe, and damsels always dance; where young men frolic from morning till night; and where existence is intended to be one long delicious *fête champêtre*. Much less time, too, should suffice to convince him that Providence had no particular spite against him, that his sorrows, if not self-produced, were only such as fell to the lot of mortals generally, and that he, whatever might be his endowments, had no right to claim exemption from any of the ordinary obligations of humanity. '*Montrez moi*,' says Ballanche, '*celui qui a pu arriver à trente ans sans être détrompé*.' Truly a large allowance for disenchantment even in cases of severe seizure! If a man has not the good sense to find out whether he is in a palace or a prison—a garden of Hesperides or a barren tract of moor or bog—within a few hours after he has entered, either his imagination must be particularly lively, or his judgment supernaturally obtuse.

Very different is all this from the noble sorrow which fastens upon many minds when they learn that life is not to be the grand career their fancy had painted; that it is all too short to admit of the execution of a hundredth part of the schemes they have planned; that the greater portion of the golden hours must be spent in the humble duties—nay, positive drudgeries, of existence,

and that practically they must lower their ambition to a level far beneath the splendid heights to which they had fondly aspired. Not in a spirit of sulky submission, still less of peevish remonstrance, least of all in a frame of despairing defiance, do these high-minded souls grapple with their disappointments. When the Ideal pales before the Real, they manfully adapt themselves to the inevitable exigency. When convinced that Earth is not Eden, and that its soil will produce thorns and briars, nettles and weeds, unless it is sedulously tilled, they take up their spades and hatchets, and go forth to perform their part of the great terrestrial task; and, instead of claiming immunity from life's burdens and life's trials, all the more earnestly do they labour with a hopeful heart for themselves, and a cheering voice for their less gifted fellow-mortals.

Yet who that has done anything in this world ever feels that he has done all he might? Not in a spirit of conceit, but in one of bitter self-reproach, will a genuine toiler confess that there is a fund of capability in him which has never been properly developed. Probably no man, however energetic, has ever yet worked up to the full extent of his resources; he has always had capital lying at the bank unused, or a letter of credit in his pocket for moneys he has never attempted to draw. Can we not imagine that a Shakespeare, Bacon, Cervantes, Goethe, Wordsworth, might have written something finer even than anything they actually produced? Admitting this, we may well believe that a vast amount of capacity perishes unseen and undeveloped. There is scarcely, for instance, a man who could not do some particular thing better than Shakespeare could have done it. Even in the literary line, there are hundreds of inferior scribes who could probably beat first-rate men of letters in numerous tasks of the pen. If Dr. Johnson had been required to draw up

an advertisement for a tradesman's establishment, or a puff for a pill, or a report of a railway company, or a sharebroker's circular, he might have done it in such magniloquent terms, and in such a pompous fashion, that few would have bought the pill, or crossed the tradesman's threshold, or cared to wade through the report, or been induced to buy a single share.

CHAPTER XI.

PERSISTENCE SPITE OF OPENING FAILURES.

BUT many there are, happily, who spite of one failure, spite of repeated failures, persist in their purpose. There is one thing, indeed, which the Supernals cannot well resist, and that is an unconquerable resolve on the part of the aspirant to bring out all that is great within him. Fortune may avert her face for a while—nay, may frown upon all his efforts and turn a sullen ear to his entreaties for help. But the hour comes when, moved by his heroic persistence, her heart relents, her countenance breaks into dimpling smiles, and a hand is stretched forth to lift the toiler from poverty into competence, and from obscurity into renown.

Kriloff, the Russian fabulist, wrote a drama, *Cofeinitsa*, before he was sixteen years old, and sold it to a bookseller for some sixty francs; but the tradesman thought so little of it that he never published it. The author next composed a tragedy, *Cleopatra*, in which a celebrated actor discovered such a number of defects that Kriloff flung it aside in despair. He then tried another under the title of *Philomela*, but this was equally unsuccessful, and its fate induced the writer to forsake the drama for a different literary field. He therefore commenced a periodical called the *Spirit Post*, but after a run of a year this died for want of support. Soon afterwards he launched another journal, the *Spectator*, but Mr. Spectator could not sell

more than 170 copies, and terminated his existence after an infantile career of eleven months only. A third time Kriloff attempted journalism, but the St. Petersburg *Mercury* failed to reach even the same feeble circulation, and went over to the dead in the course of a single twelvemonth. It was not until he was nearly forty years of age that some adaptations from La Fontaine attracted public notice, and showed to all whom it concerned that nature had intended him for a fabulist. Then he became one of the most renowned of Russian authors.[1]

For some twenty years Ebenezer Elliot, the Corn Law Rhymer, went on singing in his peculiar strain without attracting any public attention, but at last the sounds caught a sympathetic ear, and then in a very short time praises began to pour in from Southey, Wordsworth, Bulwer, and other dispensers of celebrity, in consequence of which listeners soon gathered round the man who sent forth such unwonted music from a murky room in Sheffield, where the clank of iron bars was continually heard.

Carlyle was much surprised that his *Sartor Resartus* was declined by publisher after publisher, and still more that when produced in *Fraser's Magazine* so few should trouble themselves to read it, especially at an epoch when, as he complains, no less than thirteeen editions of Robert Montgomery's *Satan* had appeared. It was scarcely reasonable, it is true, to expect the ordinary public to take the trouble of deciphering his Egyptian writings when they could have the glib utterances of a fashionable bard and a pulpit darling without even the labour of comprehension; but we all know what perseverance has done in bringing the worshipper of heroes to the front in British literature.

[1] *Kriloff and his Fables*, by W. R. S. Ralston, M.A.

M. Georges Ohnet, the French novelist, found Fortune knocking very loudly at his door just at a period when he might well fancy she had decided to show him no favour as a writer. He had tried her with a drama which he called *Les Mariages d'argent*, but she would have nothing to say either to it or to him. It was sent round to manager after manager, but with ominous unanimity they declined it altogether. Undeterred, however, by this rebuff, he attempted a story, *Serge Panine*, which brought him into such note that he determined to convert his rejected drama into a regular novel. The result was marvellous. The work proved an extraordinary success. The dross of yesterday was found to be the gold of to-day. So popular did it become that the tale was reconverted into a play, and the managers, who had previously been utterly blind to its merits, were now prepared to fight for its possession. What with the novel, and what with the play, M. Ohnet found himself in a delightful position. Fortune was now thundering continually at his door. She never came without a purse of gold. For some time his drama was performed nightly at the Gymnase, and, as he was entitled to twelve per cent. on the receipts, he is said to have netted £3000 on the first hundred representations. When this novel had reached its 146th edition, and Mr. Vizetelly published an English version, the translator stated that in its double form the work must have yielded the writer not less than £12,000 in the course of a couple of years. 'Pleasant dealings with Fortune, truly!' many a poor toiling scribe will exclaim.

Anthony Trollope's *début* as an author was extremely unpropitious. For his first production, *The MacDermots*, he expected nothing, and he got nothing. He was modest enough to believe it would fail, and, observes he with corresponding frankness, 'it did fail most absolutely.' Not the smallest notice appears to

have been taken of it by any critic, and it is probable, he adds, that not fifty copies were sold. His next novel, *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, proved as profoundly unsuccessful. Though an Irish story, it was 'never heard of even in Ireland.' A writer in *The Times* condescended to notice it in a brief paragraph, being moved thereto by a friend; but, alas, the criticism was contained in a cheap anecdote, to the effect that a supercilious flunkey having complained of the frequent appearance of legs of mutton on the domestics' table, and being told by his master that legs of mutton were very substantial food, replied, 'Yes, sir, substantial, but a little coarse.' For this work the writer did receive an account from the publisher, but it showed a loss of £63!

For his third production, an historical novel entitled *La Vendée*, Mr. Colburn agreed to pay £20 on delivery, with more, in case of success, in proportion to the quantity sold. Not one penny of these prospective profits, however, was ever realised.

Directing, then, his attention to the drama, the pertinacious author wrote a comedy in which, as he intimates, he 'embarked the best of his intellect,' copying and recopying, touching and retouching it with prodigious care; but the trusty friend to whom he sent it for judgment, returned it with a verdict of condemnation, couched in such frank and unhesitating terms, that the writer felt there was no room for appeal. Spite of all these exasperating buffetings, however, the indomitable Anthony persisted in exercising his pen. When his fourth novel appeared, the press did him the honour to notice it as a clever production, and his publisher positively grew complimentary, intimating to him that there *might* now be some little matter to divide. But, most pleasing circumstance of all, Trollope actually received a cheque at the end of the year! It is true it was only for £9, 8s. 8d., but then (except a small sum

which had been paid him under fallacious anticipations of success in a previous venture), it was the first money he had earned by literary work. At the end of the following year there came another cheque for a slightly augmented sum, namely, £10, 15s. 1d. Certainly these pecuniary results were not at all dazzling, for says the author, with the airy grace of a man who afterwards made his £70,000 by light literature, if regarded as remuneration for the time expended, 'stone-breaking would have done better.'[1] Up to the end of 1857, writes he, 'I had received £55 for the hard work of ten years.'[2]

Crabbe, the poet, had to pass through many troubles, and to ride much rough water, before he found himself in sight of port. Born in one of the dullest of villages, he was compelled to assist his father in his humble office of collector of salt-duties, and, when apprenticed to a surgeon near Bury St. Edmunds, who kept a farm as well as dispensed physic, he was required to turn his hand to agricultural tasks also, and sleep with the ploughboy. After serving three years more with another doctor, he was forced to return to Aldborough, as his parents could not provide funds to enable him to complete his medical training in London; and there, in that wretched village, with a home rendered more wretched by his father's drunken ways and intolerable temper, he was driven to employ himself in piling up butter-casks, and performing the other drudgeries of a warehouseman's calling, although a poet's heart was beating strong in his breast. Some time afterwards, the interval abounding in painful episodes, and only redeemed by a pleasing love affair, he commenced business as a surgeon, but with lame results, for his patients were chiefly people who paid in thanks instead of money, or, if in money, with a decided preference for the copper

[1] *A. Trollope's Autobiography*, p. 131. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 136, 139.

coinage. Despairing of success as a country practitioner, he at length made his way to the magnetic metropolis, carrying with him his whole fortune, which consisted of a box of clothes, some surgical instruments, and the magnificent sum of three pounds. His whole fortune? No, he left the best part of it behind him in the person of the young lady to whom he was engaged, and who afterwards, when better days dawned, became his devoted wife. But no, again! He had some poetry in his trunk, and much more in his head, and what might he not hope—ever the same flattering tale—to accomplish with such treasures at command? Months passed away without any definite progress, except towards deeper poverty, his time being chiefly spent in study, or botanic rambles, or in humble coffee-house conversation. He wrote letters to Chancellor Thurlow, Lord North, Lord Shelburne, and other prominent individuals, entreating help to enable him to publish his poems, but these applications, as might be expected, elicited no reply. Meanwhile, of course, his cash vanished; he had to sell his surgical instruments, and, afterwards, to pawn his watch, with as much of his clothing as he could spare, leaving himself only one coat with part of its elbow torn away: finally he found it necessary to run into debt to his landlord, and then sat down to await either a 'patron or a gaol.'

The latter, in fact, seemed terribly near, but fortunately the former was nearer still. Edmund Burke, to whom he had also written, was pleased with his verses, equally so with his manners when they met, and most of all with his conversation; for, said the generous statesman, 'Mr. Crabbe seems to know something of everything.' The poet's fame and position were now virtually made. Burke introduced him to Reynolds, Charles Fox, and the gruff Thurlow, the latter of whom gracefully invited him to

breakfast, and still more gracefully handed him a bank-note for £100 when the meal was finished. With equal promptness and practical kindness, the great orator went to Dodsley, and engaged the 'Muse in Livery' to publish the *Library*, which, being launched under such high patronage, was not allowed to founder like the *Candidate*, a small poem issued some months previously, but wrecked for the time by hostile criticism. In short, the poet, to use the peculiar but expressive phrase of Horace Smith, was soon to figure as 'Pope in worsted stockings.'

The gifted Curran, like many others of his professional brethren, had a long and weary wait before Fortune vouchsafed a single favouring glance. Weighted with a wife and children, he removed, after a profitless legal campaign in the country, to the Irish metropolis, where term after term he walked the Hall of the Four Courts delighting the loungers by his brilliant talk, but failing to attract any remunerative business. One day, however, there came a charming change. Living at the time in wretched lodgings, of which, as he said, his wife and children were the chief furniture, he went out one day to avoid an altercation with the mistress of the house on the insoluble problem of rent. Gloomy, as we may suppose, were his meditations whilst abroad, for had he not a household for whom there was no dinner, and a landlady for whom there was no cash? But if he came out despondingly, he went home almost desperate. Who that has ever faced a raging female with a lengthy score in her hand, and menaces of law on her lips, would be rash enough to court another encounter? Could it be called cowardice if a man declined a combat under such circumstances? Might not a hero slink away without any imputation upon his valour? Perhaps the thought, however, that he had left his wife in the lions' den, more dangerously situated even than the pious Daniel

of old, constrained him to return and brave the worst. And this is what he saw. 'When I opened the door of my study, where Lavater alone could have found a library, the first object which presented itself was an immense folio of a brief, with twenty golden guineas wrapped up beside it!' Need it be said that his earliest business, after kissing his dear ones, it is to be presumed, and offering a little silent homage to Heaven, it is to be hoped, was to appease the dragon of the house, and the next to procure a good dinner for the famished family. From that day dated the prosperity of John Philpot Curran. 'Orator Mum,' as he was called in derision at his debating society, on account of his taciturnity, became, as all the world knows, one of the most eloquent advocates and politicians of the age.

Franklin Pierce, fourteenth President of the United States, broke down entirely when he made his *début* at the bar. Chagrined as he was, he was far from disheartened. He declared that he would try the experiment nine hundred and ninety-nine times more, and that if he then failed he would repeat it for the thousandth time. What could Fate say to such an indomitable soul? It was clear he would take no denial. He would go on knocking at the door until entrance were accorded, and make his way by dint of dogged determination. With him, we may be sure, it did not require long to succeed.

Every one has heard of Sheridan's famous reply to Woodfall, when the latter gave it as his opinion that the honourable member for Stafford would never make an orator. 'I know it is in me, and it *shall* come out.' And this man, confused, stammering, hesitating, when he first opened his lips in the House, was the same individual from whom, a few years afterwards, proceeded, what Burke called 'the most astonishing burst of

eloquence, argument, and wit united, of which there was any record or tradition.'

And so all truly brave and resolute spirits have plodded on, undeterred by early failures, and undismayed by repeated disappointments, until some faint flush in the sky, deepening gradually into a roseate glow, has at last announced the coming of the golden day. They have stood to their tasks under the hope that sooner or later mankind would do justice to their efforts, and perhaps to their deserts. The full acknowledgment of their services might be long delayed, but it is enough for the honest worker to believe that his labour will not be wholly lost, whether he has been stationed in the vineyard or the wilderness, in the high places of the earth or in the humblest walks of literature or science. Forty years have frequently been spent in the stony waste; but what matter if the pilgrim reaches at last the land of promise where the rivers flow with milk, and the rocks distil sweet honey?

Not unfrequently, indeed, the crowning prize comes when the toiler is dying or dead. John Hughes, author of the *Siege of Damascus*, learnt whilst stretched on his death-couch that his tragedy had that evening been acted amidst great applause, and in the morning he left the world with the plaudits of the listeners ringing, as it were, in his ears. With what result, at such a solemn crisis, who shall venture to say or even surmise?

On the 25th of April 1595 (so it had been arranged) Torquato Tasso was to receive the laureate crown in the Capitol of Rome. The coveted wreath was to be placed on his brow by Pope Clement himself. All Italy had notice of the coming coronation, and all Rome was on the alert to witness the rare and splendid pageant. To the poet, that day would surely make amends for many sorrows, and a single hour on the

classic hill would prove an ample equivalent for years of imprisonment in the cells of Santa Anna. But it was a day the poor poet was destined never to behold. Whilst the people were preparing for the grand ceremony of the morrow, Tasso lay languishing in the Monastery of St. Onofrio, and when the procession should have started, he was found dead! His crown, like that of many a genius, came too late except to place it mockingly on his bier. A little too late is, generally speaking, all too late.

It will be seen, therefore, that every abiding, well-earned reputation must rest upon a basis of solid industry and indomitable perseverance:

> 'Even by Genius excellence is bought
> By length of labour and a life of thought.'

Another of our minstrels has sung:

> 'For sluggard's brow the laurel never grows,
> Renown is not the child of indolent repose.'

'The longer I live the more certain I am,' said Sir T. Fowell Buxton, in memorable words which are often, but never too often, quoted, 'that the great difference between men, the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is energy and invincible determination—a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory. That quality will do anything that can be done in this world, and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities, will make a two-legged creature a man without it.'

'I study, read, and work like a devil,' wrote Winckelmann. Without drawing, indeed, upon such a doubtful example, it may safely be said that what is wanted in all cases is steady, persistent, application. There is a fitful industry, all flash and dash, which seems as if it would carry everything before it when

observed in the height of its action. But the very energy which it displays may be prophetic of its speedy decline and ultimate extinction. Some people who work as for a wager at one period, may be as languid and spiritless as a drugged opium-eater at another. These are the men that complete nothing. Sebastian Bourdon, a French artist of some note, made a bet that he would paint twelve heads, each as large as life, in one day, which thing he did, and did well, if report is to be trusted. But the man was so deficient in the grace of perseverance that, it is said, he left almost all his compositions unfinished, and his want of patient study prevented his ever doing justice to the genius with which he was undoubtedly endowed.

Is it not tantalising to read in one of Coleridge's letters that the materials of a colossal production were all collected, and the first part and half of the second not only composed, but ready for the press? 'When I say,' continues he, 'that this amounts to three large volumes, and that the whole work (which, however, is capable of being published as three several works) will consist of six; that it contains my system of Philosophy and Faith, as the result of all my researches and reflections, concerning God, Nature, and Man, you will not wonder that I name it my *opus maximum*, the harvesting of my life's labours.'

But where is this glorious granary? Where is the golden fruit of one of the richest of human brains? Was not this the man whom an enraptured German, in a burst of enthusiasm, strangely saluted as a deity, after hearing him talk for the hour. 'Vy, you 're a Gott!' exclaimed he. Alas, to report, nothing but a few sheaves remain of the plenteous harvests which that noble intellect might have produced! Carlyle said, testily, of his great contemporary, 'Never did I see such appliances got ready for thinking, and so little thought! He mounts scaffolding, pulleys,

and tackle; gathers all the tools in the neighbourhood with labour, with noise, and demonstration, and sets—three bricks!'

How James Thomson managed to compose several tragedies and lengthy poems must remain a matter of surprise if we consider that he was one of the laziest of mortals. Dr. Burney, calling one afternoon about two o'clock, found him in bed, with the curtains drawn and the shutters unopened. The musical visitor could not refrain from inquiring why he kept to his couch at that unpoetic and unreasonable hour? 'Why, mon,' coolly replied the poet; 'I had no motive to rise.' Quin, the actor, who discovered him, one day, in the act of nibbling at some fruit as it grew on the tree, both hands being buried in his pockets, told him that he believed he (Thomson) would allow him (Quin) to chew his food for him in order to be spared the trouble. 'That, indeed, I would, my good friend,' answered the poet gaily, 'but I am afraid you would swallow it for me as well.' With such an invincible love of idleness, may we not suspect that he would have been pleased if there had been only three *Seasons* in the year, to write about, instead of four, and that he would have been delighted to take refuge in his own 'Castle of Indolence,' if he could only have lived in bed for half the day.

The industry of such a man as Goethe, the many-minded Goethe, was enormous. He seemed to sift everything, and to subject every one who approached him to a piercing scrutiny, in the hope of eliciting something which might add to his knowledge, or aid him in his literary undertakings. Indeed, a being who in his youth wrote that wild book, the *Sorrows of Werther*, and who for a time headed the 'Literature of Despair,' as it was called, and yet brought himself down at length to such a condition of calm indifference that he could dissect an emotion as

coolly as a flower, must have drilled his soul with remarkable severity to accomplish such an extensive change. Schiller was also remarkable for his incessant improvement. 'Every day,' said Goethe, 'he was different and more finished; each time I saw him he was more advanced in knowledge and in wisdom.'

Taking the years of preparation into account, Buffon may be said to have expended half a century in the production of his *Natural History*. Scarcely for a day was his attention withdrawn from this Herculean enterprise. An illness occurred when he had reached the sixth volume, and this compelled him to suspend his labours for about two years. How he chafed under this interruption we may easily imagine. He regarded it as a serious abridgment of life. Two years were cut out of his existence, during which, as he plaintively remarked, he might have added two or three volumes to his account of birds. It was not as if he had simply dropped those two years out of his reckoning, but he felt that he had sustained a vital loss which crippled his being, and left a blank which was utterly irreparable.

Not a languid, sauntering career, therefore, is that of the author, if adopted in an honest spirit, and pursued with meritorious views. He must take his hands out of his pockets, and his cigar out of his mouth, if he wishes to buckle to his tasks and accomplish worthy work. Those who have been the greatest in the calling have been precisely those who have been the most alive to the duty of strenuous toil, and never-ceasing acquirement.

One question, however, should seriously engage the attention of an aspirant. Is he in a position to follow Literature as a profession? Can he afford to incur all its risks, accept all its chances, endure all its delays, encounter all its mortifications?

There was a time, and this of no distant date, when, if a youth had consulted a veteran of the pen upon the point, the reply would have been a warning to trust to it only as a 'staff,' but by no means to rely on it as a 'crutch.' If you could progress fairly without it, it might serve as a pleasant walking-stick, or even help you over a rough bit of road, but if you needed it at every step it would not do to throw the whole weight of your body upon it, for sooner or later it would prove to be not only a bruised, but an utterly broken reed.

Charles Lamb's advice to Bernard Barton might, in his day, have been profitably placarded on all the paths leading to the Temple of Fame, and the muse-haunted Hill of Parnassus: 'Throw yourself from the steep Tarpeian Rock, slap-dash headlong upon iron spikes, rather than become the slave of the booksellers.'

Washington Irving may certainly be regarded as a successful author, for his writings brought him, as we have seen, both easy fame and ready money. Yet this prosperous *littérateur*, who earned £12,000 by his pen during the few years he was in Europe, regretted with bitterness—regretted a thousand times—that he had ever suffered himself to be led away by his imagination, instead of binding himself down 'imperiously' to some 'regular mode of life.' 'I hope,' wrote he to a relative, 'none of those whose interests are dear to me will be induced to follow my footsteps, and wander into the seductive but treacherous paths of literature. There is no life more precarious in its profits and fallacious in its enjoyments than that of an author. I would earnestly dissuade all with whom my voice has any effect, from trusting their fortunes to the pen.'[1]

Still bitterer must have been the advice which Thomas

[1] *Life and Letters of W. Irving*, by his nephew, Pierre E. Irving.

Carlyle is reported to have given to more than one young rhymester. He enjoined them to *say*, and not to *sing*, what they had to utter! By the Sacred Nine, could anything be more insulting to a budding bard, than to be told to write in prose instead of verse! As well recommend him to forsake the Consecrated Hill, and betake himself, for the rest of his life, to the tailor's board, or the shoemaker's bench! Of what avail would it be to be born a poet if he were cut off from rhyme and metre, and compelled to play the part of a Monsieur Jourdain all his days? Who ever heard of the mother of nightingales advising her young ones to croak like frogs, or to learn to screech like owls? Little moment, however, will be attached to the counsel of the surly sage of Chelsea by those who know how he spoke of the literary man of the day. Him he denounced as the most 'contemptible of characters.' He declared that the 'shoe-black' was a more worthy and 'respectable citizen.' To any youth intending to devote himself to literature as a calling, he should say, 'For God's sake, stop,—don't: be an honest, useful man in any other way.'

Of course warnings of this description are of little avail in general. We might as well expect people about to marry to accept the famous admonition 'Don't!' For here, there comes into play that most seductive of all fallacies, namely, the profound conviction entertained by so many, that *they* are exceptions to the rules which govern the rest of the human race; for, as 'all men think all men mortal but themselves,' so when a youth betakes himself to literature, he is quite prepared to believe that his comrades or competitors will break down if they make a similar attempt, whilst on the other hand he sees no reason why *he* should not gloriously succeed. Not until he has tried his strength in various ways, and found by unmistakable

proofs that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, will he admit the probability of defeat.

The persistence of some individuals after repeated trials, and in spite of the most obvious disqualifications, would be perfectly heroic, but there are cases in which there is no merit in endeavouring to build cathedrals out of mud or palaces with pebbles.

In one of our ablest periodicals mention is made of a person who had a rage for the composition of tragedies. He produced piece after piece, and tried manager after manager, but no one would accept his works. Disgusted, but not disheartened, he resolved to engage a theatre, and bring out his plays at his own cost. The first piece he placed on the boards was performed amidst screams of laughter and yells of derisive applause. Having expended all his resources in this hopeless rivalry with Shakespeare, he was compelled at length to retire to an attic; but the poor man still wrote on—still persisted in paying court to the tragic muse, although his advances were peremptorily declined—declaring that he would dwell 'in a garret and write plays, rather than live in prosperity excluded from the drama.'[1]

John Galt, the Scotch novelist, once undertook with the help of Colburn the publisher, to establish a periodical which should contain a selection of rejected plays. No sooner was the project announced than manuscript dramas began to pour in, and the unfortunate editor found himself almost drowned in a deluge of literature from which it was difficult to extract anything that was worth printing even in the humblest form. 'The New British Theatre,' as it was styled, had a short run; but if it had accepted all the pieces that were offered, it would soon have

[1] *Cornhill Magazine*, Oct. 1863.

rivalled Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates* in voluminousness, and almost surpassed that work in weariness.

Wordsworth, the poet, mentions in one of his letters an obscure writer of the name of Sanderson who lived in Cumberland, and whose cottage happened one night to take fire. The neighbours flocked to the spot, and endeavoured to rescue whatever they could from the flames. The owner barely escaped with life, and on recovering himself inquired eagerly whether a certain box had been saved. It contained a collection of his pieces which he had laboriously corrected for publication. On being told that it had been consumed, he exclaimed, 'Then I do not wish to live,' and in a few minutes actually breathed his last.

It says much for literature that when the passion for it has once been formed, when its pleasures have been fairly tasted as well as its pains, it seems almost impossible for a writer to relinquish the bewitching pursuit. He is drawn to the desk by some magnetic power, and the pen which he may have flung from his fingers after each failure is picked up after a brief interval of disgust, in order that he may return to his task as eagerly as before. 'I must write or die,' exclaimed one who had been thus incurably smitten.

A writer who some years ago published an account of his literary acquaintances in the earlier half of the century, concludes his narrative and clenches his warnings by a summary of the fate and fortunes of the band in question. Out of the panel—

Four committed suicide;
Five expired in a state of mental derangement;
One died a debtor in the King's Bench Prison;
Two more spent many years in the same institution;

Ten, after a long fight with poverty, left their families in such needy circumstances that subscriptions were made in some cases for their relief;

One (Sir W. Scott) reaped a fortune by his pen, but lost it again in printing speculations;

A few earned a moderate subsistence, but this only by incessant toil;

And a few, not dependent upon literature for a livelihood, added something to their means by the occasional use of their pens.

In the present day matters have greatly changed. Since the institution of circulating libraries which can carry off a whole edition of a book without trouble to the author or publisher; since the establishment of hundreds of periodicals, each of which requires a corps of contributors; above all, since the extraordinary development of the newspaper press has raised up a standing army of writers as well as readers, the profession of Literature has acquired a substantial character, and a moneyed dignity which it never previously possessed. The chink of coin is now heard, and sovereigns are constantly flitting about in the Republic of Letters. Cheques are not unknown even in Grub Street, and authors who, had they lived in the last century, would have slept in garrets (scarcely that), and gone about with a hole at each elbow, are often reputed to keep an account at the bankers and to invest rather heavily in railway preference shares. But of course these advantages are to be secured only by considering the tastes and requirements of the public, and by pursuing the trade-tracks (if they may be so called) which lead to success. The unknown author who hoped to command a brilliant livelihood by producing epics, or tragedies, or profound metaphysical works, or prodigiously learned treatises of any

description, would soon find himself in debt at his publisher's, and, if he persisted, would probably have to take his degrees in the Bankruptcy Court.

It will still therefore be prudent to remember, even in these better-paid days of ours, that John Milton received only £10 for *Paradise Lost*, and that Wordsworth informed Matthew Arnold that he could not tell the number of years which elapsed before his poetry brought him enough 'to buy his own shoe-strings.' Nor will it be amiss to compare the receipts of a jockey with those of the finest poet or the profoundest thinker. The Duke of Westminster paid Cannon £1500 a year for his labours in bestriding horses, and Frederic Archer's revenue returns astounded all who failed to see the inestimable services which he rendered civilisation, and who, if told in explanation, that these worthy persons had helped their employers to win large sums of money, would be simple enough to inquire whether others must not have lost every guinea that had been so gained. They would argue, doubtless, that no solid addition to the resources of mankind was perceptible, as the result of a race on Epsom Downs or Newmarket Heath, whereas a good book is a gift which may prove of value to millions, and may constitute the heirloom of all succeeding generations.

That remarkable man Thomas Holcroft, who spent part of his life as a stable-boy, and part of his maturity as a dramatist and novelist, pouring forth nearly thirty plays, amongst which *The Road to Ruin* stands conspicuous, bethought him in his declining days of writing his autobiography as an incentive to industry, and a lesson to young men in the art of conquering difficulties, and levelling the rough places of life. When the resolve was formed he was groaning under a variety of diseases, and the sands were running rapidly down in the hour-glass of

Time. How far would Death allow him to proceed? He commenced his task, however, dictating the work slowly but heroically, his sentences being punctuated, we may say, with commas of pain, and full stops of agony. He implored his medical men to secure him six months more of existence, if possible, and told them he would willingly submit to the most torturing treatment if that would enable him to complete his book. The doctors, however, were helpless; the Dark King was inexorable, and poor Holcroft was marched off to the tomb before his record had reached the sixteenth year of his existence, leaving the most important part of his career wholly unchronicled.

CHAPTER XII.

THE AUTHOR'S WORKSHOP.

ASSUMING, however, that the aspirant has become an accepted author, let us follow him into his workshop, and glance at him whilst engaged in the pains and pleasures of composition.

Some writers sit down to their desks in a very unprepared frame. Sterne pretended that it was his practice to throw off the first sentence as best he could, and then to trust to chance for the second. Not the way certainly by which many lasting works of merit have been produced! With a somewhat larger range, but from a very different cause, William Hazlitt, it was said, when commencing his labours, could never see more than two or three sentences ahead.

There have, of course, been careless and hasty writers who have nevertheless won for themselves great names in literature. Henry Fielding's plays were generally composed at a gallop. Leaving the tavern late at night, he would write a scene or two on scraps of paper in which tobacco might have been wrapt, and present them next morning to the actors for committal. He was forced by necessity, as Lady Mary Wortley smartly remarked, 'to publish without correction, and throw many productions into the world, which he would have thrown into the fire, if meat could have been got without money, or money without scribbling.' The consequence was, that piece after piece

was condemned, the verdict being aided, even in those vicious days, by the flagrant indelicacies in which the dramatist thought it his duty, or, what is much more likely, found it his pleasure, to indulge. At first the author frankly confessed that his precipitate ways justified the hisses of the public; but repeated failures led him to conclude that he was the victim of a conspiracy set on foot by certain young gentlemen of the town, who made it their special sport to ruin plays in general, and notably those of Henry Fielding in particular. When, however, we learn that an audience sat patiently through nearly three acts of the *Universal Gallant*, charitably expecting that the comedy would improve as the plot advanced, we must suppose that the explosion of dissatisfaction which finally ensued was due to its intrinsic demerits, rather than to the malice of a cabal.

Beckford's *Vathek* was thrown off, according to his own statement, at a single sitting, which, however, lasted three days and three nights. If so, this was certainly a great feat, especially when we remember that the book was penned by an Englishman in French. But it seems to have drained him pretty well for the future, for, though he was only twenty-two when he reeled off this feverish production, he never favoured mankind with anything of note during the remainder of his eccentric existence.

Very different was the course which Jean Paul Richter pursued. Fertile as his fancy might be, and well filled as his brain undoubtedly was, the first step this great writer took before he commenced any work, was to stitch a quantity of paper into a book, and jot down all the principal features in the proposed production. There was the outline of the whole composition, with sketches of the leading scenes and characters to be represented; minutes of the thoughts to be embodied; and huge

stores of material to be wrought into a solid fabric. These collections he was accustomed to describe as his 'quarries,' one being called 'quarry for Hesperus,' and another 'quarry for Titan.' His studies for the latter work filled, when printed, not less than seventy well-crowded duodecimo pages.

Some even of the tiniest compositions have been the result of prolonged gestation. Such was the case with the *Deserted Village*, for Sir Walter Scott states that the author was engaged for five years in gathering material for the poem during his country excursions, and then expended more than two years over the production itself.

Bacon's Essays, individually considered, are as short as they are pithy; but it is clear that such pregnant compositions could not have been thrown off whilst the writer's pen was cantering over the paper, unless the matter had been previously matured, and the language already elaborated in his mind.

Over many massive literary works, indeed, a conscientious builder, whether in prose or poetry, has sometimes spent a goodly portion of a long life. In preparing his great History of the Ottoman Empire, Von Hammer consumed thirty years, sparing neither trouble nor expense in procuring every original authority on the subject. For this purpose he examined in person every book-shop and Oriental collection he could discover during his residence in Constantinople, and his excursions in the Levant; and afterwards kept correspondents at Bagdad, Cairo, Aleppo, and other towns, to act as literary scouts and foragers. All the great libraries of Europe were similarly ransacked. Without possessing any income beyond a moderate salary, this enthusiastic explorer found that he had gathered together, in those thirty years, a body of authorities on Turkish History which no literary depôt in Europe or in Asia could rival in richness.

Hear, too, how a prominent Englishman of our own times went to work, though in a field where little learned research was required. 'My books,' says John Stuart Mill, 'have all been written twice over; a first draft of the entire work was completed to the very end of the subject; then the whole begun again *de novo*, but incorporating in the second writing all sentences and parts of sentences of the old draft, which appeared as suitable to my purpose as anything I could write in lieu of them.'

It is, however, in the tedious process of correction perhaps that authors have best exhibited their anxiety to render their labours as perfect as possible.

Virgil is reported to have spent four years in revising his great poem; and, being overtaken by death, he directed that it should be burnt as an imperfect work. 'Troy,' as was forcibly said, 'almost perished in a second flame.' Hume, who wrote his *History* three times over, declared that he would rather not write at all than send his productions into the world maimed and incomplete. Montesquieu, in preparing a short piece, thought he should have killed himself: 'You will read it,' he observes, 'in three hours, but I assure you it cost me so much labour that it has whitened my hair.' Dr Young used to spend weeks in harmonising a few refractory stanzas. 'If I wrote four words,' said Boileau, 'I should erase three.' Jacob Bryant, the author of many learned works, transcribed and revised his productions several times before he committed them to the printer. 'Three processes of this kind,' says Madame d'Arblay, were the 'fewest he could ever make do; but generally nothing went from him to the press under seven.'

Bürger was accustomed to ascribe his success, not so much to his ability as to his industry. If his poems were worth any-

thing he thought it was due to the patient untiring use of the file (*dem langen unverdrossenen Gebrauche der Feile*). His best productions, as his biographer declares, were those of which there was scarcely a single stone of the original structure left standing.

Even in quarters where scrupulous care might have been little expected, it has sometimes been conspicuously displayed. That scampish poet, Richard Savage, reckless as he was in almost every other respect, seems to have laboured under a spell which was absolutely tyrannical. In going through his proofs, he would alter a word or a sentence, and then recur to his first reading, remaining, however, irresolute to the last. A question of punctuation would give him more trouble than a whole paragraph does to most scribblers. And when printed (as his biographer relates), the intrusion or omission of a comma by the compositor was sufficient to discompose him, whilst the error of a single letter was regarded as a 'heavy calamity.'

Almost the last word in the language we should ever think of applying to Sheridan is the word 'scrupulous'; and yet there was one point wherein it was eminently deserved. The care with which he worked out some of his compositions was marvellous, if the reckless, insouciant character of the man is considered. The progress of his productions from their roughest state to their final condition may be gathered from the specimens presented by his biographer Moore. These indicate a passion for perfection which nothing could appease. Hundreds of writers would have rejoiced to take over all the credit of the *School for Scandal* in its most primitive form, and would have held the piece to be matchless and almost unimprovable; but when the author sold the copyright to Ridgway, he delayed the delivery of the MS. for a considerable time, on the ground

that for nineteen years he had been endeavouring to satisfy himself with the style, but had not succeeded.

Very often John Foster, the essayist, would 'spend a whole day in adjusting two or three sentences,' being perplexed about certain niceties of expression which the majority of readers, as he admits, would have found it difficult to comprehend. Indeed, so cruelly conscientious was he about his work that he never wrote a single page without a 'painfully repugnant sense of toil, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred was sufficient to override all feeling of pleasure.

'I never think I have written well,' said a careful author, 'unless I find that I have written myself ill.' 'With every sermon I preach,' observed Robertson of Brighton, 'I part with so much of my life.'

Rarely has a more finical and, indeed, insatiable corrector existed than Honoré Balzac—certainly one of the most thoughtful, as well as prolific, of French fictionists. Any work of his might be said to have only just commenced when he sent the manuscript to the press. Two or three proofs were nothing to him: of *Pierrette* not less than twenty-six were taken. Sometimes he cancelled entire chapters, and others again were so altered that they might just as well have been written anew. Of course this remodelling cost him a large sum, for his printer found it necessary to charge him as no other author in Paris was charged; but the novelist preferred fame to cash, and willingly paid for the gratification of his fastidious taste. He bargained with the proprietors of the *Revue de Paris* to allow them one-fifth of the amount he was to receive for each contribution, simply for permission to alter the proofs as freely as he liked.

It will be seen, therefore, that whatever truth there may be in

the smart dictum that easy writing is hard reading, there cannot be much satisfactory reading unless the author has expended considerable toil not only in the work of preparation, but also of completion.

No one possessed the gift of brilliant inspiration more markedly, says M. Flourens, than De Blainville, the great paleontologist. Yet when a listener once expressed his admiration of the way in which the professor had treated a difficult subject in an hour's discourse, 'I am glad you are satisfied, replied he, 'for I have meditated upon this lecture for eight days, from nine in the morning until midnight.'

If there is an author whose language is easy and elegant, an author whose thoughts appear to be clearly and beautifully defined, we may fairly say it is Rousseau. And yet from his own pen we learn that he could neither think nor compose without extreme difficulty. Worse than a schoolboy biting his nails, scratching his head, and cudgelling his brains over a subject of which he knows nothing, was the most fascinating writer of his day. When he addressed himself to any literary task, his attempts at thought in the first instance were painfully ludicrous. For a considerable time his ideas on any given topic were imperfectly grasped, and all miserably jumbled. They were kept seething and fermenting in his brain, whilst his face flushed and his heart palpitated just as if he had been a girl musing over her reply to a critical offer of marriage. All was chaos within, and it was not until after much meditation that the confusion abated, and something like order appeared.

But when his conceptions took definite form, he found it a still harder task to marshal them in working array for the reader. Before he could commit them to paper it became necessary for him, as he says, to write them down in his brain. It was

whilst walking in the woods, or sauntering amidst the rocks, or lying on his couch in the silence of the night, that this torturing operation was performed. Wanting as he was in memory, for he declares that he could never in his life retain half a dozen verses by heart, we may well believe him, when he states that it often cost him five or six nights' labour to work some of his periods into acceptable shape.

But this done, there still remained the most formidable step of all, namely, to write out the product for the press. Scarcely a thing proceeded from his pen, in fact, which he did not transcribe four or five times before he allowed it to travel to the printer. Whatever, therefore, we may think of Jean Jacques in a general way, must we not give him the credit of being a literary labourer who never 'scamped' his work?[1]

Nor has this rigorous toil on the part of the writer been without parallel in the preparations of the actor.

The pains which Garrick took with himself, in order to play his *rôle* (whatever it might be) with faultless efficiency, should be a lesson to all facile performers who trust to their inspiration more than to diligent study and thoughtful effort. On great occasions our Roscius spent the day in working up his mind and tuning his soul for the duties of the evening: he refrained from dining, and avoided all conversation as far as possible; nay, even whilst the piece was in progress, he shrank from exchanging a word with any of his colleagues, or (still more surprising) with any of the dramatic sisterhood. It was said of him that he was as earnest and laborious in his preparations for the boards during the last year of his theatrical life as in the first. And might not the same be said of many other stars of the stage? How indeed

[1] 'Mes manuscrits raturés, barbouillés, mêlés, indéchiffrables, attestent la peine qu'ils m'ont coûtés.'—*Les Confessions*, p. 117.

can a player hope to project himself into another man's being, soul and body, unless he worms his way into the usurped individuality by careful, studious steps?

But whatever preparation may be made for his work, and however conscientious a writer may be in its execution, much must depend upon that mysterious Something which authors are accustomed to call Inspiration. In more elderly eras than our own, when a poet sat down to his desk he was accustomed to invoke the Muse. This was a graceful compliment to a graceful nonentity. What has become of the good lady and her elegant sisters it might be difficult to say; but a formal apostrophe to this once popular authority would now be considered unpardonable pedantry even in a school-boy effusion. Any serious supplication addressed to such a personage would be enough to sink an epic of modern production. It is much more likely indeed that some writers will appeal (in fact, if not in words) to the decanter or spirit-flask as one of the surest substitutes for the 'sacred nine.'

Byron assured Medwin that 'gin and water was the true Hippocrene, and the source of all inspiration.' Sheridan, with his roystering wit, was accustomed to say that if an idea 'be reluctant, a glass of port ripens it, and it bursts forth; if it comes freely, a glass of port is a glorious reward for it.' Addison, as is well known, was in the habit of pacing to and fro in his chamber whilst dictating to an amanuensis, there being placed at one end of his beat—some authorities say at both ends—a bottle, the contents of which grew perceptibly less during his ramblings, and probably vanished altogether before their conclusion. It was said that in the rollicking days of Christopher North, when that wild wielder of the critical tomahawk was accustomed to offer large libations to Bacchus, the cunning

compositors could mark his progress from sobriety to alcoholic possession by the state of his copy, and could tell with unerring accuracy what particular point of inebriation he had reached at any particular page. Coleridge (of course without expressing approval of the practice) compares some writers to musical glasses, which, in order to elicit their finest tones, must necessarily be 'kept wet.' Pope says of Dr. King, a wag of considerable note in his day, that he 'could write verses in a tavern three hours after he could not speak."

> 'Since from his bottle King derived his wit,
> Drank till he could not speak, and then he writ.'

When we consider, however, the story of drunken genius—and of this melancholy samples will be given anon—must we not accept the saying of Sir Walter Scott, 'that greatness of any kind has no more terrible foe than Intemperance'?

But, as if to make amends for the disappearance of the classic Muse, it is worthy of note that in recent days a novel sort of afflatus has been discovered. This is neither derived from alcohol nor Hippocrene. It comes from spirit, it is true; but from spirit in its literal, or at least in its more scholastic, significance. Amongst the seers of modern times we frequently hear of Mediums, who pour out poems, orations, or philosophical disquisitions, although apparently incompetent in their natural condition to make the humblest approach to any effusion of merit. Through the lips of these honoured parties the souls of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, and other deceased celebrities, have been alleged to speak, though, it must be admitted, with a strange abatement of power, as if their faculties had grown confused, and their earthly intelligence had sadly deteriorated during their celestial sojourn.

But how does the reader think one of the greatest 'compends of human philosophy' was composed? For 'grandeur of conception and encyclopediacal range of subjects,' Professor Bush declares that he knows of no work by any single mind which can 'bear away the palm from this production.' No human author in any department of literature or science, asserts another admirer, has ever 'electrified mankind' to such an extent as the writer in question.

Whence, then, was *his* afflatus derived?

The author was placed in an easy chair. A magnetiser made sundry passes. The patient's eyes were bandaged, and after certain convulsions he lapsed into a state akin to physical death. Speech, however, was left him, and a few sentences flowed from his lips, after which there came a pause. These sentences being taken down by an amanuensis, the discourse was continued at intervals, until the speaker, an utterly unlettered youth, had rolled out the material of a book which embraced all the great questions relating to God above, to man below, and to nature around! This individual was Andrew Jackson Davis, the 'Poughkeepsie Seer,' and the work was the *Principles of Nature, her Divine Revelations, and a voice to Mankind.* In other words, it is the moral *Principia* of a mesmerised Newton. All the world must of course have heard of the 'greatest compend,' or else the world has strangely neglected its duties, as well as proved indifferent to its noblest interests!

William Blake, the poet artist, gentlest of half-madmen, professed to be visited by the spirits of departed friends and distinguished personages. Under their inspiration he produced various pieces; but it was noticeable that when he acted simply as their amanuensis, and even when they were good enough to dictate to him what he considered 'the grandest poem in the

world,' the production was found to be little better than the ravings of a mind obviously distempered. This necessarily suggested the horrible thought that if his ghostly advisers were addicted to such wild literature, lunacy must constitute the very law of the existence they were now leading! Not a pleasant conclusion by any means! Should not those who treat us to revelations from the spirit-land carefully consider this point, and give us proof that the intellect is exalted, not deteriorated, when the mortal puts on immortality?

From whatever source, however, the needful inspiration proceeds, we might suppose that the possessed one would seek solitude and silence in order to elaborate his thoughts. Dickens could bear no interruption, and occasionally a single call upon him seemed to paralyse his powers for the day. So far, however, from courting retirement, there have been writers who could compose with perfect freedom in a company, or even in a crowd. Gautier could throw off one of his brilliant essays amidst the talk and bustle and laughter of a *café*, whilst the printer's boy stood waiting with impish impatience for a supply of copy.

Speaking of Mrs. Stowe, Mr. Fields tells us that it made very little difference to 'the most popular female writer of America' whether there was a throng of people about her, or whether she was entirely alone, whilst engaged in literary work. The greater part of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written by lamp-light on a pine table, round which the children of the family were collected whilst conning their various lessons for the ensuing day. Undisturbed by the hum of their young voices, and unconfused by the questions they were continually putting, she 'wove together those thrilling chapters which were destined to find readers in so many languages throughout the globe.' 'No

work of similar importance, so far as we know' (adds Mr. Fields), 'was ever written amidst so much that seemed hostile to literary composition.'

Jane Austen was accustomed to employ her pen in the general sitting-room of the establishment, where, of course, she was liable to frequent interruption. Wishing to conceal her employment from the servants, as well as from all visitors, she wrote upon small sheets of paper, and hid them under her blotting-paper whenever steps were heard. A creaking door, fortunately placed, gave her notice in case an intruder were at hand, and when it was proposed to correct the 'nuisance,' the authoress insisted that her noisy sentry should be retained.[1] There was no special reason why she should seek to hide her avocation; but it may add to the interest of her novels (rarely read in these sensational days) to know that she wrote them like a guilty merchant's clerk, who pens love-letters instead of bills of parcels, and secretes his illicit lines under his pad whenever his master's voice is heard, or a customer's form is seen.

Some prefer motion whilst their brains are at work. John Foster, the essayist just mentioned, could do little either in the way of thinking or composing unless he were at liberty to walk about during the process: and he spoke of the number of miles he had traversed in a single room as something marvellous. In the whole, he had as good as half compassed the globe in his pacings, and many a threadbare carpet, and many a well-worn floor, bore testimony to the deep musings of the owner, as well as to the peripatetic toil with which his thoughts were evolved.

Barry Cornwall asserted that he did his best when walking the streets of London. Not that he attempted to write down his verses in thronged thoroughfares, otherwise the police would

[1] *Memoir of Jane Austen*, by J. E. Austen Leigh, p. 96.

have been fully justified in ordering him off to Parnassus, if not to prison; but if he could not trust his memory, he would run into a shop, beg a scrap of paper, however crumpled, and return home with a little poem inscribed on the wrappers in which some groceries had probably been folded.

Amongst the quaint conditions under which some authors have loved to write, it may be mentioned that Mézérai—that honest historian who was deprived of his post and his pension because he wrote with too much reserve respecting his sovereign's deeds, and too little respecting the doings of his royal ancestors—could only work comfortably by candle-light, and even in summer or at noonday it was necessary for him to seek out some darkened chamber for the purpose.. Dr. Young's Muse was nocturnal in her habits, and appeared to be in greatest force at midnight, vanishing, indeed, like a ghost at cock-crow; but who will wonder that this should have been the case with a sombre and sententious poet, whose very fancies were draped in sack-cloth, and who dealt with death's-heads and other funereal emblems as if they were the playthings of existence?

Alfieri, eccentric in most of his ways, was equally so in his literary labours. He had his fits of composition. Sometimes he would address himself to work with passionate ardour, and at others give himself up to idleness or frivolous enjoyment. Summer was his favourite season for plying the pen, just as 'the interval between the autumnal and vernal equinoxes' was with Milton; and when the fit of toil came upon the Italian, during the more advanced portion of his life, the intensity of his application was such that he usually paid the penalty in a smart autumnal illness.

Silvio Pellico, and his friend Maroncelli, whilst undergoing imprisonment at Spielberg—denied, as they were, the privilege

of pens and paper—worked out poems and tragedies in their minds, and were therefore compelled to rely upon their memories entirely. Yet they corrected and polished and refined their productions in their brains as fully as if they had been committed to writing.[1]

Ercilla composed what may be called the great epic of Spain, the *Araucana*, whilst serving in the army as a volunteer against the Indians in Chili. At night he wrote down the events of the day whilst others were slumbering, using for this purpose the merest shreds of paper, or even resorting to straps of leather if nothing better could be procured.

But whilst some have preferred to toil in solitude and silence others have gone into literary partnership, and worked together so harmoniously that, like our Beaumont and Fletcher, it is difficult to indicate their individuality. There the firm was as one man. Their doubled-brained dramas read as if they were the products of one mind and one will. A well-known instance of a literary co-partnery has been furnished by Erckmann-and Chatrian. With a difference of character and sentiment, which marks them out personally as men of remote affinities, the imaginative prevailing in one, the logical faculty in the other, the two have been able to produce books which appear to be the product of a single intellect, working always in the same vein and with precisely the same object.

Pleasant were the literary, as were also the domestic, relations which subsisted between Pierre Corneille and his brother Thomas Corneille. Though the author of the *Cid* and *Cinna* was much older and vastly more celebrated than the author of

[1] 'Mirabile fu la capacità che acquistammo di poetare lunghe produzioni a memoria, limarle e tornarle a limáre infinite volte, e ridurle a quel segno medesimo di possibile finitezza che avremmo ottenuto scrivendole.'—Silvio Pellico: *Le mie Prigioni*, p. 231.

Le comte d'Essex, they lived harmoniously in the same house, and made common stock of their effects. They had married two sisters, but their wives' property remained undivided until the elder dramatist died. When at work in their rooms, Pierre might find himself in want of a rhyme, in which case all he had to do was to open a little door communicating with his brother's apartment and request a supply of words. Thomas, being the less brilliant poet of the two, was, however, the more ready or the less fastidious, and therefore promptly shovelled in a quantity of substantives or verbs, as occasion required. From this supply the grateful Pierre made his selection, and went on building up his tragedy with recruited vigour.

Happy are the authors who can keep an amanuensis. Mr. James's wonderful fertility can be explained only upon this principle. To suppose that he had written two hundred volumes with his own right hand (that being about the number of his accredited works, to say nothing of his periodical or fugitive productions), would be to ascribe to him a mechanical industry alone, which would be highly creditable to any reporter or lawyer's clerk, even if his muscles had all the wear of steel. But the prodigious amount of labour thus accomplished loses something of its marvellousness, if we bear in mind that he employed a secretary to whom he would begin to dictate at an early hour in the morning, and so continue until two o'clock or thereabouts, probably resuming the operation in the after part of the day, and then occupying the evening in the correction of the MS.

There was a time, however,—happily antiquated, it is to be hoped,—when the work of composition was frequently interrupted by a peremptory rap at the door. Enter a bailiff. In the more mythological eras, when the Muse was supposed to visit

every poet and help him with his rhymes, the business of dictation must have been occasionally broken by a wrangle with a creditor. May we not venture to picture an interview between the august lady and one of the minions of the law, armed with a *fieri facias*, or, worse still, with a *capias ad satisfaciendum*, when writs of civil arrest were allowed? 'Pray, what are you doing here, you fellow?' the Illustrious One would exclaim. 'How dare you disturb us whilst I am dictating to my friend and follower? We are in the midst of a tragedy, and cannot have our task interrupted by any sublunary questions whatever.' Unabashed by the reprimand, Catchpole draws out a slip of parchment, and reads, 'Forty-six pounds ten and threepence for debt, and nine pounds twelve for costs.' The poor author throws down his pen in despair. 'I have not half-a-crown in the house,' replies he. 'Then sorry to say you must come to my quarters in Cursitor Lane; snug spot; charges not heavy; send for your attorney, and all will be right I have no doubt.' The Muse thereupon assumes her most tragic look, and in tones far more freezing than ever came from the lips of a Siddons or a Rachel she harangues the bailiff on the fiendish nature of his proceedings; intimating to him that he must surely have come from the Tartarean regions. 'Avaunt!' exclaims she, in fearfully melodramatic style, 'thou abhorrent offspring of chaos and chancery; born in a gutter, bred in a stye, with skin of shrivelled parchment, and lanky locks all powdered with pounce; back to thy wretched haunts, and rid us of thy hideous presence!' Much more bad language of the same description! Catchpole is taken aback by the apostrophe of the tragedy queen; he had much rather have been treated to a dose of plain home-brewed Billingsgate. To that he could have replied in something like corresponding terms. But, the classic dodge, as he calls it, is too much for him, and he dare

not attempt a response, fearing that it will invoke another and perhaps fiercer tornado. All he can do is to repeat '£46, 10s. 3d. debt, and £9, 12s. 0d. costs; total, £56, 2s. 3d.'

Having heard the mournful assertion, however, that there is not half-a-crown on the premises, Tipstaff, with great presence of mind, ingeniously suggests to the debtor, 'perhaps the lady there can help you?' Strange to say, the idea of borrowing from the Muse has never struck the poet before. He has borrowed, or tried to borrow, from his father and mother, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts; borrowed, or tried to borrow, from his cousins in the first, second, third, and every traceable degree; borrowed, or tried to borrow, from all his friends and acquaintances whom he thought open to pecuniary phlebotomy; borrowed, or tried to borrow, in fact with splendid impartiality, from Jew and Gentile; nay, possibly he may have interested himself, like the impoverished young nobleman, in the discovery of the Ten Lost Tribes, with the full intention of negotiating a loan from them as soon as their whereabouts was ascertained. He may have learnt, too, as Mürger says of one of his characters, to borrow in almost all the known languages of the globe, and studied them simply for this particular purpose; but the Muse, till now, he has marvellously overlooked! Availing himself eagerly, however, of the bailiff's suggestion, he turns an appealing glance to the lady, but alas! the moment he opens his mouth to mention money she vanishes from view (like one of the Homeric gods when compelled to confront a human difficulty), and leaves him to settle matters with Catchpole as best he can.

Speaking, however, of bailiffs, a body of men whom we might suppose to be impervious to refined influences when performing the duties of their calling, let us not forget the splendid suscepti-

bility displayed by a certain member of this profession who was sent to arrest poor Benjamin Haydon for debt. The worthy officer, having exhibited the fatal slip of parchment, was shown into the painting room, whilst his prisoner was making a few melancholy preparations for the sponging house. On the artist's return, the unwelcome visitor was found to have been so strongly impressed by the 'Raising of Lazarus' that he exclaimed in an agitated tone, 'Oh, sir, I won't take you! Give me your word to meet me at 12 at the attorney's, and I will take that.' Captor and captive met accordingly at the indicated spot, and, in the hope of settling the matter amicably, another interview was appointed for the evening. The lawyer intimated to the officer that he must keep the debtor in his custody meanwhile. 'No,' replied the gallant fellow, who knew nothing of the painter personally, 'let him give his word, and I'll take it even if I am liable to pay the debt.'

Fortunately, in our days, though gentlemen of this equivocal persuasion may come with warrants of distress for rent, or with writs of execution for debt, they cannot carry an author off as they used to do, and keep him in villainous durance to the great interruption of his labours. Nor, indeed, if they fell upon him in full force could he, on his part, hope to deal as happily with them as Sir Richard Steele did on one occasion. Spite of his impecunious position that merry knight gave a gay dinner-party, and surprised his guests by the number of his liveried retainers. These proved to be mostly sheriff's officers who were in possession of the mansion, but whom the ingenious host had turned to festive account.

Perhaps, also, it may not be unreasonable to allude to another class of men who have proved no mean foes to literary labour. Far more persons than Charles Babbage have suffered severely

from organ-grinders and German band-performers. One day in November 1882 Anthony Trollope was at work in temporary lodgings in Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, when a musical troop stationed itself close to his windows, and began to pour out its brazen utterances without stint. The novelist had been annoyed by the same band some time before, and had then spoken sharply to its leader, but now, excited by their contumacious reappearance, he sallied out and a wrathful scene ensued. In the evening he went to dine with his brother-in-law, Sir John Tilly, and whilst at table fell from his chair, struck by paralysis, and deprived of the power of speech. On the 6th December, little more than a month having elapsed, he found himself in a land where it is presumed that street-organists cease from troubling, and where the sounds of the hurdy-gurdy are never heard.

But escaping or surmounting these and other nuisances, let us suppose that the important work proceeds apace, and at length approaches completion. Then, if it be one of an imaginative character, the interest and excitement of the author naturally increase, until these sometimes become positively oppressive. The voyage will soon be finished, for there are the home cliffs in view; but he will have to part from his companions, and the friends he has conjured up will disperse. His nervousness may also augment, for probably he finds his strength impaired by the creative toils he has undergone. 'You can't imagine,' says Dickens,—'gravely I write and speak,—how exhausted I am to-day with yesterday's labour. I went to bed last night utterly dispirited and done up. All night I have been pursued by the child (little Nell), and this morning I am unrefreshed and miserable. I don't know what to do with myself!' Parting with a subject is no light task, even though the book should be one of pure fiction, and the characters entirely

of the author's own invention. 'Done!' wrote he, when replying to Forster's expression of hope that *Old Humphrey's Clock* was nearly completed; 'why, bless you, it shall not be done till Wednesday night,' as if he could not tolerate the idea of uttering his farewell.

In sedater studies, however, who that has brought a lengthy labour to a termination does not feel some exultation when he puts the finishing stroke to his task? And who would deny the author the crowning rush of emotion, the glorious avalanche of delight, which he is entitled to enjoy when he reflects that he has toiled in an honest spirit, and reared a monument upon which men will look with pleasure, and perhaps with lasting respect?

CHAPTER XIII.

DEALINGS WITH CUPID.

IN the lives of most men there is one epoch—there may be several—in which they fall in love. They pretend they cannot help it. They are seized by an invisible power, and forced to do homage to some enchanting face and faultless form. The unseen archer has drawn his bow at a venture, and pierced them through and through with his sweetly envenomed darts. The luscious poison soon finds its way into every vein, and passes with intoxicating effect through the minutest capillaries in the system. Then follows the fever which no physician but Time, and no medicine but Matrimony, is supposed to cure.

Are great geniuses in any way exempt? No more than they are from the measles or the chicken-pox! Like the rest of the perfidious creatures they swear undying attachment to Laura one day, and transfer it to Mary Matilda the next. Their eternity of affection lasts twelve months, or twelve weeks, or twelve hours, as caprice may dictate, or as convenience may suggest. Some of them indeed by the very ardour of their nature, and the inflammatory character of their hearts, are much more susceptible of this complaint than the ordinary sons of men. Such often fall an easy prey to the shafts of the little god who loves a noble quarry, though he does not disdain to

make a Saint Sebastian of a village bumpkin or a town costermonger.

But though this is a stage of human experience upon which we ought to look with some degree of lenity, it must be admitted that both men and women have ever been unblushingly foolish on the subject of love. It seems to be the incurably weak point in our humanity. In every generation, and almost in every individual, the infirmity reappears with unabated force. No one is ever the better in this respect for the follies of his predecessors. There is infinite significance in the fact that never is a batch of love-letters read in court without eliciting roars of laughter. The moment counsel commences the perusal of one of these silly epistles, every face, from the portentous countenance of the judge, full of doom, to the pimpled visage of the usher, full of alcohol, is put on the grin. The listeners are prepared for any revelation of absurdity. Nothing astonishes them. Indeed, their only surprise would be to find that there were half a dozen really sensible sentences in a quire of amatory stuff.

What a tale this tells, does it not? Would any wise man commit himself hastily to the composition, and much less to the despatch, of a love-letter, just after leaving a law-court in which he has seen every individual shaking with fun over a budget of such frantic literature? 'No intelligent creature,' said a wag, 'can be excused for penning a love-epistle, except on the ground that it will, most probably, be directed to a person as infatuated as himself.' Was it for this reason that, in paying his addresses to his second wife, the letters Sheridan sent to her were mostly copies of those he wrote to the first?

It has been alleged that Sir Isaac Newton was so far mortal as to succumb to this amusing mania. Amongst the Portsmouth papers, which furnished Sir D. Brewster with much information

respecting the great philosopher, there was found a letter addressed, according to the indorsement, 'by Sir I. N.' to Lady Norris, the widow of Sir Wm. Norris, a gentleman who had been Ambassador to the Great Mogul. This letter contained an invitation to marry. Now, as the discoverer of the gravitation theory was pictured by the Marquis l'Hôpital as a 'celestial genius entirely disengaged from matter'; as he was referred to by Halley in the light of a mortal who had approached as near to the immortal gods as it was lawful for man to go; and as, moreover, he had attained the mature age of sixty and upwards, it must be interesting to observe how such a sexagenarian sage acquitted himself in this trying species of composition.

Very sorrily, we are bound to say! It is precisely the kind of epistle we might expect from a school-boy, if ordered, by way of exercise, to solicit a widow's hand in cold blood. The writer intimates that her Ladyship's grief at the loss of Sir William shows that she cannot have any aversion to husbands on principle. As much as to say, that because a woman had loved Mr. A. devotedly whilst he lasted, she must be capable of entertaining a similar affection for the next letter of the alphabet. Then the writer tells her, that to be always thinking about the defunct ambassador to the Great Mogul must be to live 'amongst the sepulchres,' and that grief is a great enemy to health. And can she, he asks, resolve to spend the rest of her days in sorrow and sickness? The next argument reads like a stroke of waggery. He insinuates a doubt whether she looks the exact thing in widow's weeds. They are ugly garniture at best. A mourning habit must render her less acceptable to society, and, if so, can she determine to wear it perpetually? [Oh! the guile of man's heart, philosophical or otherwise, when engaged in courtship; it is positively sickening.] In short, continues he, in plain

human terms, the proper remedy for all these mischiefs is—a new husband! Let her Ladyship decide at once. The malady is unquestionable—but there is the medicine; and since the writer has reason to believe that she likes 'the person proposed,' he doubts not that he shall soon have notice of her inclination to marry!

We must decline, however, to believe that this epistle, even if dictated by Newton, was designed as an offer from himself. For the honour of gravitation we refuse to admit that the sage who whipped out the greatest secret of the physical universe from a falling apple could have penned such a glacial letter, even if he had desired to succeed the ambassador to the Great Mogul, or, still more, the Great Mogul himself. We can imagine an equity draftsman, with parchment face and mummied heart (age upwards of seventy), concocting such a production; but who will believe it of the immortal Newton?

There have been profound thinkers, indeed, who have courted in a still more curious fashion. Few such love-letters have been written as the massive discourses which John Foster, the essayist, inscribed to Miss Maria Snooke. Those who have read these thoughtful compositions—compositions which have influenced thousands of young men and women in the management of their lives—will scarcely refrain from wishing that every age and every town had a Jack and a Jill of a similar complexion. Little treatises on 'Decision of Character,' and on the 'Aversion of men of taste to Evangelical religion,' may seem strange substitutes for burning rhapsodies without sense and fond sentimentalities without grammar. But Foster was resolved, apparently, that he and his future wife should not resemble the enamoured couples who 'court in poetry,' and afterwards 'live in prose.' He paid his addresses to her (practi-

cally speaking) in some of the weightiest prose ever penned, and yet enjoyed perhaps as much of the poetry of the situation as his philosophical nature would permit, for, in Maria Snooke, unromantic as was her surname, he found a perfectly congenial partner.

Now and then men of genius enjoy the brilliant advantage, as it might seem, but equivocal and even calamitous, as it occasionally proves, of being the wooed instead of the wooers.

Bürger received one day, from Stuttgart, an anonymous poem setting forth the pleasure which the writer had derived from his writings, and intimating that she would be happy to accept him as a husband! The lines were sufficiently graceful to please a poet; the invitation was sufficiently flattering to attract a twofold widower, and the impudence of the transaction was sufficiently piquant to interest a man whose heart was as inflammable as tinder. But, plainly, he could not accept an anonymous hand, or engage to marry an unknown bride. He replied, therefore, in verse as well, and published both pieces in the *Almanac of the Muses*. This led to a more prosaic communication. Bürger obtained an introduction, and the result of the romantic affair was the very mundane ceremony of marriage. Sad to say, however, in the course of little more than three years, the poet found it expedient to appear in a Court of Law in order to get the nuptial knot unloosed. By that time he had had enough and to spare of his flatterer: the anonymous charmer had become painfully definite, in fact intolerably personal.

J. P. Richter, amidst many admiring communications, received a letter from one, Maria Forster—a girl in her thirteenth year. She had begun to read his writings when only ten, and, in the undisciplined ardour of girlhood, thought she recognised in him

a master-soul with more than kindred tastes. Being much younger, she begged permission to consider him in the light of a father, and declared her intention of visiting him, once at least, as a necessary contribution to her happiness. This epistle was followed by others, but, receiving no reply, the foolish creature resolved to put herself to death! One morning she took her way to the Rhine to drown herself in its romantic waters, carrying with her also a knife, which was to be suicidally employed, if, for any reason, the preferential expedient should be frustrated. Being tracked, however, by a suspecting sister, her purpose was luckily prevented. Soon afterwards, Richter replied in a considerate tone, and was shocked to learn from the girl herself what a terrible tragedy had been nearly enacted. Some further correspondence ensued, but the love-sick maiden, becoming conscious that her affection was by no means of a purely literary kind, concluded that Jean Paul must contemn her for her advances, and then, seeing no hope of anything like an adjustment of matters here, she determined to leave the world in earnest, as if convinced—strangest of all delusions in the case of suicides—that things *must* certainly be mended in the world to come. She therefore wrote a final epistle to the idol of her soul, informing him of her intention, and assuring him that a lock of his hair, which she had previously begged, should remain on her neck, and be taken with her to the spirit-land. This time she managed to carry out her purpose, and the miserable victim of an unruly passion quenched it effectually in the waters of the Rhine.

More fortunate in its origin, as well as in its result, Lamartine's courtship arose out of a little flattering event which might have won the heart even of a phlegmatic Briton, to say nothing of an excitable, ever-impressible Frenchman. One evening at

a *fête* at Florence he heard a sweet voice murmuring some lines from his own *Meditations*, of which two ran thus :—

'Peut-être dans la foule un âme que j'ignore
Aurait compris non âme et m'aurait répondu.'

Inquiry followed, and with such a charming introduction could an impassioned poet fail to find in the accomplished Englishwoman, from whose lips the strains had flowed, the very being whom they prophetically described?

Very different, however, were the circumstances under which his brother poet, Chateaubriand, fell into the hands of Cupid. At a time when the author of the *Génie du Christianisme* felt, as he admitted, no qualification for the post of husband, his sisters took it into their heads that he ought to engage a wife. Can a young woman be perfectly happy, suggests an abandoned satirist (name unknown), unless she is thinking about a marriage, talking about a marriage, promoting a marriage, preparing for a marriage, figuring at a marriage, criticising a marriage, or (more important than all) getting married herself? Not the young ladies in question, at least. They were mistresses of the situation, and therefore in command of the desired sensation. They fixed upon a friend, Mademoiselle de Lavinge. They opened negotiations. Their brother had not seen the elect lady above three or four times, and what he knew of her was more by sight than by intercourse. She had a large number of francs for her fortune, but the poet was too much in love with the Muses to care much about Mademoiselle de Lavinge or her money. Resigning himself, however, at last to his sisters' importunities—for what chance had he against three fair sophisters, all eager for a matrimonial exploit—he exclaimed, 'Be it as you will.' With this *carte-blanche* in their hands, it is

needless to say that the kindly conspirators proceeded to arrange the matter in spite of certain difficulties arising with an awkward uncle; and, though Madame proved to be an admirable wife, her husband discovered that, even long after her marriage, she had never read a single page of his works!

A graceful kind of courtship was that of his countryman Guizot. Mademoiselle de Meulan was editor of a journal called the *Publiciste*; but her health breaking down suddenly she was compelled for a time to abstain from literary work. Thrown into despair by this misfortune, she received a letter from an anonymous writer, offering to supply the articles she was bound to contribute until she should be able to return to her post. Most thankfully was that offer accepted, and faithfully was the promise discharged. For a considerable period she could obtain no clew to the generous unknown, and it was only after earnest entreaty made in the journal itself that he threw off his disguise. The service was not forgotten, and when Guizot asked for a wife he received not only a willing hand, but a grateful heart.

Men of genius, however, don't always make the best lovers. Few Englishwomen would care to have had Heinrich von Kleist for a sweetheart. The letters he wrote to Wilhelmina von Zenge during their courtship were almost as unattractive as financial essays or funeral discourses. He forgot the suitor in the schoolmaster. He prescribed five years' education for the poor girl, and as time sped onward, seemed to discover that this period was too small and ought to be indefinitely extended. When offered a government post, which would have enabled him to marry, he declined it on the mysterious ground that he could not bind himself to support 'general interests' where he had not proved their correctness by his reason'; and in communicating his resolution to Wilhelmina, he graciously remarked that it was

needless to speak to her of Liberty since that was a subject which no woman was able to understand.

Eventually, when the eccentric suitor was prepared to assume the character of a husband, he insisted that the marriage should take place without the knowledge of her parents, and without the presence of a single spectator.

This arbitrary demand led to an altercation, and the result was that Fraülein von Zenge and Heinrich von Kleist parted company, she to become the wife of a less exacting professor, he to form a Platonic attachment to a married woman, and seal, or rather sever, it with his heart's blood.

After his wife's death, and within a few hours of that melancholy event, William Godwin commenced a kind of controversy with Mrs. Inchbald, in regard to some slight which the latter had offered to the departed Mary (Wollstonecraft). The former lady, whose novels were popular reading when our great-grandmothers were sampler-stitching misses, whose comedies were once amongst the most acceptable productions on the stage, and whose history was so piquant that her publisher offered her £1000 for her autobiography, had, in fact, persistently shunned the equivocal advocate of the 'Rights of Woman.' At the moment Godwin was probably in some doubt whether to quarrel with Mrs. Inchbald or to make her an offer of marriage.

He therefore opened a correspondence with the lady, and invited her, as it were, to a wrangle over his late wife's coffin. This led to nothing, but within six months afterwards the phlegmatic philosopher laid siege to the affections of Harriet Lee, one of the popular authoresses of the *Canterbury Tales*, and other works of fiction. He commenced leaguer in the most formal fashion, playing the dialectician instead of the lover, and plying her with arguments instead of endearments—a mistake few women ever favour or forgive.

He even went so far as to accuse her of mediæval barbarism, because she overlooked the man in the unbeliever, the philosopher in the atheist. Persisting in her rejection of his suit, and declining, as women naturally do, to be reasoned into matrimony, Godwin was compelled to raise the siege and look round for another fortress to invest. Is it any wonder if he went angrily to work? He had such a strong conviction of his own importance, as a writer, that he could not well understand anything like opposition to his claims as a suitor. There was a Mrs. Reveley, to whom he had made frosty love before he took to Mary Wollstonecraft, and whom, as Mrs. Oliphant remarks, he would have married at the time, but 'for the trifling circumstance that she was married already.'

This mistake, however, pursues that charming writer, was soon 'rectified' by the death of Mrs. Reveley's husband: and in the very same month Godwin summoned the new-made widow 'to admit him to her presence, apparently in the position of a lover.'[1] The lady naturally demurred to this hasty cartel. Propriety forbade. The despiser of authority was indignant, and denounced her, in the usual fashion of the lawless, as a 'slave' to custom.

Never, perhaps, was the question put in a more icy and insolent form. 'This connection,' wrote he, 'I should think would restore you to self-respect, would give security to your future peace, and ensure for you no mean degree of respectability.' And, as if to give an additional sting to his humiliating language, he adds: 'What you propose to choose in opposition to this I hardly know how to describe to you.' In other words, he seems to say, 'Now, Madam, I have made an offer to you—I can't conceive what difficulty there can be about the matter.

[1] Mrs. Oliphant's *Literary History of England*, ii. 265.

You surely will not be such a donkey as to throw away a good chance like this. Is there any reason you can possibly allege? I have given you the chance, and if you decline, it must be to your own infinite damage.' Spite of his menacing demonstration, Mrs. Reveley refused to strike her flag, and the arrogant suitor eventually was married to, or 'married by,' a Mrs. Clairmont, 'a woman of no special pretences, and with two children as her dowry.'

Robert Hall's courtship (of which there are many versions) was one of the strangest and succinctest that ever occurred. To appreciate its oddity, we must bear in mind that he was a grave divine, with a grand head and a grander soul; with an intellect so opulent and comprehensive that Dr. Parr declared him to be inspired; and with a reputation so alluring that whilst at Leicester, even Cambridge Professors were drawn to that town for the Sunday to hear him preach; and whilst at Bristol, London celebrities, like Brougham and Mackintosh, occasionally took similar trips to listen to the torrent of eloquence which poured from his lips. Visiting a friend one day, a servant girl came into his room to bring some coals and recruit his fire. 'Betty,' said he to her abruptly, 'do you love the Lord Jesus?' She, supposing this to be a purely pastoral inquiry, answered in the affirmative. 'Then,' replied he, 'you must love me also.' Great was her surprise when it was followed, more swiftly than the thunder generally follows the flash, by a demand of her hand in marriage! To her it was as if an Emperor had offered a share of his throne to his washer-woman! Could she believe her own ears when asked (coal-scuttle probably trembling in that solicited hand) to mate herself with a man of whom the same Dr. Parr spoke in his Spital Sermon—if she only knew it—as one who had 'the fancy of a poet, the acuteness of a

schoolman, the profoundness of a philosopher, and the piety of a saint.' Betty showed her good sense by drawing the conclusion that the great preacher had lost *his* senses, and straightway ran to her master to tell him that Mr. Hall must have gone mad again. Explanations ensued: the guest protested that he was in sober earnest, and that he had been charmed by the manner in which the girl had put the coals on the fire! The grand pulpit orator and the humble housemaid were speedily united, and their wedded life proved quite as happy as if they had gone through all the elaborate absurdities of a protracted courtship on perfectly equal terms.

Zschokke was greatly assisted in his love-making by electricity. A thunderbolt came to his help and expedited matters very much with his beloved Anna. He not knowing the precise state of her affections, and therefore being somewhat uncertain in regard to his approaches, this strange ally seems to have taken up his case with considerable earnestness, and speedily found means to extract some definite information from the lady. During a storm a flash struck the house, and whilst all was alarm and confusion, and nobody knew who was injured, Anna allowed her solicitude for him to appear in so marked a form that he could no longer question her partiality. Taking prompt advantage of the disclosure, he made overtures to the lady at once, and the pair were soon married, never probably forgetting the good turn which had been done to them by the formidable meteor in question. Cupid's darts are commonly supposed to be tickling missiles, since they are extensively courted, but one of Jove's fiery bolts was a dangerous implement to invoke or employ.

Sir H. Davy's courtship might be said to savour of chemistry, for it was during this fascinating interlude in life that he wrote

his Chemical Philosophy, which he afterwards elegantly dedicated to his wife. Nor need we perhaps feel surprised that he should be able to give the requisite attention to such a subject (the book as well as the lady), for if there is a science which harmonises with the fluctuating emotions of the love period, it is surely that which deals with attractions and elective affinities—with elemental likes and dislikes—and which, in truth, is founded entirely upon the romantic marriages and divorces of matter.

After courtship comes—sometimes, not always by any means—the great event of matrimony.

The bridegroom indeed may not always be forthcoming at the right moment.

Louis Pasteur, whose remarkable researches in regard to parasitic organisms, spontaneous generation, and especially the cure of hydrophobia, have made his name ever memorable, was so occupied with his inquiries on his nuptial morn that a messenger was sent to remind him of the little transaction fixed for that day, and had to summon him from the laboratory to the altar.

A bridegroom, in fact, may regard the ceremony as an intrusion upon his pursuits, which ought to be resented, if not exactly resisted. Budæus, a learned philosopher of the sixteenth century, was accustomed to work so hard that he could scarcely spare time for his meals—dining, so to speak, at full gallop, whenever he condescended to dine at all. He consented to marry—a great concession on his part to the usages of society—but shortly after the wedding he disappeared, leaving the bride and her friends in the lurch, and, when subsequently captured, complained that he was only allowed six hours' study on that occasion. Spite of this inauspicious slip, he proved a reasonable husband.

When Robert Southey stood at the altar, it was with a penni-

less bride. His aunt, who had brought him up as her son, was not there to smile upon the union: she disapproved of it so highly that he felt compelled to quit her house and forego all prospects from that quarter. His own pockets were so vacuous that he was unable to pay the marriage fees, and the very wedding ring had been purchased for him by the kindly Cottle. His generous uncle Hill had been waiting to carry him off to Lisbon, on purpose to frustrate, or at any rate postpone, this imprudent match until more promising auguries appeared. But too late to effect this object, it became necessary for the bride groom to bid farewell to the bride as soon as the nuptial ceremony was performed, the arrangements for the voyage having been fully made.

Is it any wonder if the poet was agitated by strange emotions as he plighted his troth to the woman who might virtually be a widow the next moment, though formally a wife? All that he could do as they parted at the church door was to press her hand in silence; and all that she would do was to remove the ring from her finger and suspend it by a ribbon from her neck. Not without much nobility of soul was this unwise step taken on the part of Southey, for his object was to ensure her whatever property might accrue to him in case he should never return; whilst, at the same time, he concluded (with more consideration for her than regard for his relatives) that as his relict she would have some claim upon them both for cash and consolation.

The affectionate wiles of the human heart are sometimes as striking as its more malignant devices, for here was a man marrying in defiance of the judgment of his family, and yet proposing to burden them with an obligation of which they disapproved.

Or the union may prove ill-starred, as is too frequently the

case in all ranks, from the children of the sun to the offspring of the clod. Shelley's union with Harriet Westbrook was more like a little drama, acted by a couple of thoughtless children, than a solemn league and covenant between two rational creatures. They went into wedlock as if they were performing a charade, and kept up the fun for a season, chasing each other round the garden like butterflies, or playing at house-keeping with the artlessness of children, who pretend to drink tea out of toy cups almost as big as thimbles, or to dine off plates nearly as large as penny-pieces.

But the pretty puerilities in which the pair indulged soon turned to tragical realities. Shelley left his wife, left his child, and went off to the Continent with another female, only to hear in due time that his deserted partner had quenched her life under the cold wave, where so many attempt to drown all sorrow without asking whether they do not, at the same time, extinguish all hope?

Coleridge lived apart from his wife for a considerable portion of his married days. For such a man there could perhaps be no true domestic companionship in the ordinary sense of the expression. One might as well think of an old Hebrew prophet, who dwelt in a cave amongst the mountains, and communed incessantly with the heavens, mating himself with some very uninspired daughter of the city, and subsiding into a family man with more children about him than he knew how to manage. Yet Mrs. Coleridge was a woman of noble character, great accomplishments, and admirable domestic qualifications. Nor was she at all incapable of comprehending her husband, or of appreciating the magic of his mind as well as the extraordinary reputation he had acquired. But separate, for the most part, they lived, and separate they died.

The 'Ancient Mariner' complained indeed in tremulous accents that he found little sympathy in married life, though he asserted at one time that he 'could have been happy with a servant-girl who sincerely loved him.' 'I sometimes think,' said he, when the canker-worm was gnawing at his breast, 'I shall write a book on the duties of women, more especially to their husbands,' frankly confessing, however, that a new Duty of Man to the sex was as much required, and that this could only be penned by some female whose heart was as true as her head was wise. How far he was fitted to discourse, in his magnificently nebulous way, upon this delicate, but very practical topic, may admit of considerable doubt, especially if we believe him to have been serious when he asserted that the most happy union he could picture would be that of a deaf man and a blind woman!

Montaigne found that he had had enough of matrimony when his wife died, and, by way of expressing his opinion upon wedlock, he audaciously declared that he would not marry a second time, even if Wisdom herself offered him her hand! This was pretty strong language for a worshipper of knowledge, but we suspect that even if the lady had been as ugly as 'muckle-mouthed Meg' of Scottish story, who could only secure a husband by giving him the alternative of the *altar or the halter*, he would have thought twice before he rejected the grandest dowry in creation. Possibly he would have accepted her —at least after a little demur—with some caustic joke about King Solomon who wedded her in bygone days, but who allowed himself a few horrible hundreds of wives in addition.

Hooker, the author of the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, one of the ablest works ever composed of its kind, is always referred to as the 'Judicious.' One could scarcely mention his name to a cultivated man without suggesting this rarely merited epithet.

He would say, 'Hooker, the judicious Hooker,' just as naturally as in speaking of Jeffreys we should say, the 'bloody Jeffreys,' or of John Graham, the 'bloody Claverhouse.' But see how the good man acted in the choice of a wife, a matter in which all his prudence was pre-eminently required! Falling ill in London, during a visit, he was attended by a woman who nursed him carefully, but took advantage of his debilitated, and, may we not say, defenceless, condition, to urge upon him the necessity of procuring a help-meet; for, with such a tender constitution as his, said she, he ought to have some one to watch over him incessantly. He acknowledged the justice of the position in a general way. For a female meditating matrimony, either in her own person, or in the person of any of her acquaintances, this was a sufficient opening. She offered, therefore, to choose him a wife. What did the judicious man do? With consummate credulity—intolerable stupidity, it might be called—he left it to her to make the selection, and promised, without seeing the person, without knowing anything of her, to take her as his wife! The woman fixed upon her own daughter, and though Joan had no fortune, and was destitute of beauty as well as of accomplishments, the 'judicious' man accepted her as his mate! He was too much of a gentleman, or, dare it be said, of a simpleton, to refuse. Worse still, as Anthony Wood observes, she was 'a clownish, silly creature,' and, worst of all, she proved to be a perfect Xantippe in temper. When subsequently visited by two of his former pupils, at a small living in Buckinghamshire, they found him in a field watching sheep with a Horace in his hand, his servant having been subpœnaed by his wife to assist her in her household duties. There they waited until the man returned, after which they proceeded to the house, hoping to enjoy his conversation; but alas! poor Hooker was speedily

summoned from their company. What to do? Why, to rock the child's cradle! Go he must, for the good man dare not disobey. He had allied himself to a shrew instead of an angel, and to a masterful tyrant instead of a loving helper.

Mr. Berridge, vicar of Everton, in writing to the Countess of Huntingdon, observes that matrimony had maimed Charles Wesley, and might have spoiled John Wesley and George Whitfield as well, if a 'wise Master' had not graciously sent the two latter 'a pair of *ferrets*.' In other words, these worthies, who might probably have neglected their great spiritual mission had they been luxuriously mated, were kept on the alert by their peremptory spouses, and driven out into public life instead of being tempted to indulge in domestic repose!

Mr. Berridge himself, who, before he entered upon his living, studied fifteen hours a day, and afterwards preached ten or twelve sermons a week, riding nearly a hundred miles for the purpose, found it necessary at one period to think of marriage as a relief, or, as he playfully expressed his idea, to look out for a 'Jezebel' of his own; he, having been grievously tormented by an ill-tempered housekeeper for eight years. So formidable did he consider the step, and so likely to cripple his utility, that he resorted to Biblical divination, and resolved to be guided by the result. On the first attempt he alighted upon a most ominous and forbidding passage in Esdras; but the devil (who it seemed was an advocate for wedlock in his case) having suggested that the book was apocryphal, he made a second essay, whereupon all his matrimonial purposes were knocked out of him by opening upon the injunction to Jeremiah, 'Thou shalt not take thee a wife.' Thoroughly scared, the pious vicar remained a bachelor, and a useful member of society notwithstanding.

Addison, it is well known, had an uneasy time of it with the

Countess. Even before marriage he had his troubles with the good lady. His courtship was not only long, as is frequently the case; and anxious, as is invariably the fact, whether rapid or protracted; but tormenting, as generally happens when, as here, the fair one is capricious or disdainful. As the widow of the Earl of Warwick, she stood stiffly upon her dignity; and when the idea dawned upon her that the ex-tutor of her son, an untitled individual though a poet and a politician, had dared to dream of offering himself as a mate, it may well be supposed that she was astounded at his audacity. But the idea of a lover is naturally pleasing to the female heart. The idea of a husband is still more delightful if the man has any peculiar merit, even though there may be a decided inequality of rank. Addison doubtless understood his game, for who can imagine that Mr. Spectator, who knew so much of the wiles and secrets of the sex, would be rash in his approaches to the proud dowager? His movements were, in fact, modest and discreet; 'timorous,' indeed, as became an humble individual who was aspiring to an infinite honour which nothing but unbounded clemency on her part could possibly concede. Without doubt, the shrewd essayist would commence by hinting that he considered himself privileged to breathe the same air and enter the same room; he would modulate his civilities from time to time so as to convey the idea that nothing would give him greater delight than to sit with her for a few minutes on the same sofa, if such a liberty could be pardoned; until, at length, in a moment of tender compliance on her part, he daringly insinuated, though with true Addisonian elegance, that it would be the crowning point of his ambition could he be permitted to stand by her side for a few minutes at the altar, and then allowed to call her entirely his own! To the titled dame, proud as she

was, it was something to have the author of *Cato* and *Blenheim* and, above all, the literary *arbiter elegantiarum* of the age sighing at her feet, and therefore, at last, after many snubbings for the sake of her Order, she consented to reward him with her hand. The wedding-morn, however, was not a particularly providential day for Mr. Spectator. In fact, the nuptial ceremony proved a *mauvais quart d'heure* for him. The difficulties of courtship were promptly followed by the miseries of matrimony. What his life was as a husband may be confidently inferred from the intimation that there was a small house near the turnpike to which he was accustomed to retire when the Countess was excessively 'troublesome.' Is not this awful enough? What a mournful tale a single sentence in a man's biography may disclose! If Mr. Spectator had written the story of his courtship and marriage-distresses, we can imagine what a delicious account he would have given had the events happened to any one but himself. The richest Addisonian humour would have pervaded the production had the whole transaction been conducted at the personal cost of one of his friends or acquaintances.

Strange scenes, indeed, must have occurred. The lady was jealous of his frequent visits to the coffee-houses or taverns which literary men were accustomed to haunt. May we imagine the poet-politician in full swing at the Grecian, the Rainbow, the Rose, the Bedford, the Shakespeare, or Nando's, discussing the new play just brought out at old Drury, and jousting with the foremost wits and critics of the day, when a note or a message is brought him that the Countess requires his presence! What a collapse ensues! The sentence which was rolling out of his lips is cut in twain, and then bunglingly concluded or left hopelessly unfinished. There is, of course, a titter throughout the company when the nature of the summons is understood, and one or two,

who think themselves partially hidden, break into a laugh. Some of the party, with mock gravity, regret that the missive deprives them of his charming society, but affect to conclude that it does not admit of appeal; whilst others, still more cruelly, congratulate him upon the high state of domestic discipline he has attained, assuring him that he is a model whom other husbands might profitably imitate. And when the much-married man quits the room, is it surprising if he is followed—there is no mistake about it, indeed—by an unrestrained burst of merriment?

When a peremptory female is awaiting the appearance of a vagrant spouse, and finds him at length within punishable distance, it is easy to imagine that a lively scene may ensue. Fortunately, as soon as her Ladyship learns, and it is almost the first point on which she demands information, that the poet has been in the society of his own sex alone—'you swear that, Addison, do you?'—her wrath is considerably abated. Further, the elegant essayist expresses his concern in such graceful terms, and with such happy touches, that the midnight lecture, when it arrives, loses much of its vigour, and indeed proves to be fairly within the limits of human endurance.

But all this comes of a commoner marrying a countess.

It was pretty much the same with Wycherley, the dramatist, when he fell into the hands of the Countess of Drogheda. So jealous was the lady of her husband, that though he was graciously permitted to spend some time at a tavern opposite the house, it was only on condition that the windows should be left open in order that she might satisfy herself, as Lord Macaulay bluntly puts it, that 'no woman was of the party.'

Dryden is another stock illustration of the perils of ambitious espousals. Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of

Berkshire, gave him her hand, but was unable to accompany it with her heart, either because she was destitute of such an organ, or because it had been worn away in illegal devotion to the Earl of Chesterfield. The poet and his partner had few things in common, except their failings. She was by no means immaculate, and he was a person of easy morality, whose life was stained with dissipation, as his plays were saturated with impurity. What was his opinion of his lady may be gathered from his answer when she reproved him by saying, that had she been one of his books he would have shown her more attention than he did as his wife. To this the poet maliciously replied that he could have put up with her as an Almanac, for then he could have changed her every year! And if report is to be trusted, it was he who, in anticipation of survivorship, wrote the caustic epitaph —famed in many versions :—

'Here lies my wife, here let her lie :
She 's now at rest, and so am I.'

Let us not speak of Xantippe, except with bated breath. Would it not be lawful to treat her case (after the fashion of Niebuhr) as a pure legend, and to rase her name entirely from the roll of verified women? The chief reason for retaining her as a genuine entity is, that she was reputed to be the wife of one of the most tolerant, best-tempered, and indulgent of philosophers, and that, consequently, she serves as a foil to set off his matchless forbearance and invincible good-humour. It is difficult to believe that the man who discoursed so pleasantly, and with such inimitable grace, and in a spirit of such charming gaiety, could possibly have had such a termagant at home. To leave those learned groves, and the crowd of worshipping disciples who hung upon his pregnant utterances, and retire to

his house, where the sharpest tongue and the shrillest voice, and the perversest temper, and the most unfeminine disposition in all Athens, probably in all Greece, possibly in all Europe, it may be on the face of the globe, awaited him, must have been a trial such as the man of Uz would have found it perilous to encounter. Who does not wish, if she were a verity in the flesh, that fate had paired her with some surly cynic like Diogenes, who might have compelled her to inhabit a tub, or carry a companion wallet; or that, failing this, she had been wedded to some unmannerly brute who knew how to tame his shrew long before Petruchio was supposed to be born?

But, after all, it is quite possible that the poor woman may have been much maligned out of compliment to her husband, and with a view to exalt him as a model of endurance. Certainly it is impossible to refrain from some feeling of pity, and even respect, when we hear how she visited him in his condemned cell, and gave way to such paroxysms of grief that it became necessary to turn her out lest she should disturb his parting discourses.

Time would fail to tell of Milton, Molière, Bulwer, Dickens, and a host of other distinguished individuals who have been severely married, or have had to thank themselves for much wedded misery. Of how many may it not be said, as Sainte-Beuve concisely remarks in reference to the great French dramatist, '*Sa vie domestique ne fut plus qu'un long tourment.*' And how many other authors have there been who would willingly have written four treatises in justification of divorce (like the Bard of *Paradise Lost*),—nay, twenty if necessary—could their pens alone have effectually severed the nuptial knot. Or again, says Bishop Hall—that epigrammatist of piety—'how many have we known whose heads have been broken with their own ribs!'

But fortunate beyond expression is he who adds to the rare gift of genius the magnificent accompaniment of a loving and congenial wife. Heaven deals very generously with such a man in giving him a double dowry of blessing. To a young poet or philosopher happily mated the world straightway assumes a magical aspect. It looks as if its very deserts were clothed with verdure, as if the sands in its streams were changed into gold, and as if its rivers all flowed with milk and honey. 'Life,' said Schiller, 'is quite a different thing by the side of a beloved wife, than when forsaken and alone, even in summer. Beautiful nature! I now for the first time fully enjoy it—live in it.' From this enchanting position he looked to the future with cheerfulness and confident expectation. The light from Hymen's torches had cast its purple glow over the path that lay before him, and lit up the coming years with prophetic splendour. Or, putting the matter upon a much humbler footing, as Jean Paul did in his own quaint comic way, was it not a fine thing to possess a wife who 'loved his very clothes because she loved himself, and would willingly make them with her own hands?' Wieland was an adoring husband. 'God send to every poet,' said he, 'such an active, firm, prudent, candid, tender, and kind wife as mine.' Her presence, or at least her proximity, was so essential to his happiness, that if he were compelled to leave home for a week he was seized with an irrepressible longing to return. If she stepped into his study now and then, whilst at work, just to speak a word or two, he was contented; nay, if he simply knew that she was in the room, he felt that his guardian angel was close at hand. And when she was taken, and the light of his life was hopelessly extinguished, 'Why,' groaned he in his anguish, 'could we not, like Philemon and Baucis, have died in one day?'

Who again can fully realise, for instance, the charming scene which was so frequently exhibited in the house of Opie the painter? There was he at work, with his gifted wife Amelia, the authoress, by his side, watching the progress of his pictures, chatting gracefully and encouragingly, and now and then offering suggestions where she thought there was room for improvement. Such was her gentle influence, that it is said his female portraits grew softer and more refined from the period of their union, and that the fascinating smile for which she was remarkable settled upon the faces he limned, although the painter could not discover any corresponding attraction in the originals. Could a more delicate compliment be paid to a woman than the transfer of that engaging smile to other countenances, as if all would be bettered by its presence, and as if its sweetness could vivify a hundred humbler frontispieces?

On the other hand, it was he who prompted her to turn her literary talents to higher account, and who stimulated her to the production of those charming tales which our well-behaved grandmothers read with such pleasure, and recommended to their children with such profound confidence in their worth.

Pretty little sparkling surprises of a professional sort have been known to give especial zest to wedded life. One cannot read, without keen enjoyment, of the pleasure of the German authoress, Benedicte Naubert, whose works had been published anonymously, when her husband presented her with a copy, not knowing that they were the productions of his own wife; a very charming scene, rare in matrimonial life, would doubtless ensue, when the delighted gentleman learnt, on his part, that he was carrying coals to Newcastle; and when the good lady discovered, on hers, that, in his candid opinion, her writings were worthy of being offered as a token of his fathomless affection. That day

the pair would doubtless feel as if they had just been married again; and from that day, also, their relationship would be put upon a tenderer footing than ever.

Not unlike this little incident was one which occurred in the parsonage at Sedgefield in Durham: 'Ah, Jamie, if you could only write like that!' said Mrs. Grahame to her husband, after he had made her a present of a poem called the *Sabbath*, with well counterfeited innocence, probably asking her candid opinion on its merits. It was Grahame's own composition.

A devoted Benedict (after a fashion) Thomas Lovel Edgeworth must have been. Most persistent was that man in the matter of matrimony. He went on wedding one wife after another, filling up each vacancy as it occurred with wonderful promptitude, as if he were determined to have it out with the sex, and to see how many of them he could manage to survive. This habit he pursued through life, although his famous daughter, steady in her spinstership, was his faithful companion during the later affairs, and, indeed, was older than her final stepmother.

But far from adopting the somewhat Mormon views of this uxorious person, it must be observed that not a few men of genius have run their career in a state of celibacy—some from preference, some from distrust, some from disappointment. Not that wedlock, as we have seen, is really adverse to literary labour or scientific research, for, it is reported of Gregorio Leti, an Italian of the seventeenth century, who wrote a large number of histories dealing indifferently with Louis XIV. or Philip the Second, with Pope Sixtus V. or Protector Cromwell, that 'for twenty years consecutively he presented the world with a child and a volume.'

Confucius is stated to have dismissed his spouse in order that she might not interrupt his learned pursuits; but it may well be disputed whether the Chinese sage, who has been the

mental ruler of more millions, perhaps, than any other human being, might not have reduced the lady to inertness, had he been so determined, without dissolving the matrimonial tie.

Leibnitz made an offer when about fifty years of age, but it led to no results; and he seems to have been of opinion that matrimony was a thing which a man might reasonably take a whole lifetime to consider. Newton, his great antagonist (at least on the subject of Fluxions), spite of the attractions of the ex-ambassadress, kept his mind free from the distracting cares, as well as the distracting blessings, of wedlock. Had it been otherwise, who knows but that the famous apple which drew, or is supposed to have drawn, his mind upwards to the moon, would have been looked upon in a culinary light, and simply suggested visions of dumplings gleefully devoured by a group of children? At any rate, had he been the parent of half a dozen youngsters, he would have picked up the fruit when it dropped at his feet and put it in his pocket, as a little gift to Miss Bridget or young Master Isaac.

It is not at all surprising that James Thomson—him of *The Seasons*—should have remained a bachelor, since it was said that he was too lazy to fall in love. Certain it is, he could not have sustained the fatigues of a prolonged and arduous courtship. It is supposed that the Amanda, with whom he flirts occasionally in his poems, represented some substantial nymph, capable of going through the marriage service had she been formally approached; but the bard, who was far from inviting in appearance, having more fat about him than beseemed a poet, and possessing a heavy inanimate countenance, might possibly shrink from the horrors of rejection, as well as from the waste of energy involved in the conduct of an unsuccessful suit.

Charles Lamb, unmoved as he was by matrimonial considera-

tions, declared that he would rush into wedlock at any time if he could have one of Shakespeare's heroines to wife. Does not this idea embody a valuable suggestion? Why should not each intellectual bachelor choose one of the finest creations of fiction, make her an offer in fancy, wed her in the same easy way, and keep himself worthy of her companionship for the rest of his days? Would any one object to polygamy in this particular form?

Failing that greatest of domestic blessings, a 'noble woman nobly planned,' Heaven has been known to supply some admirable compensations occasionally.

Cowper, the poet, though disappointed in his early attachment to a cousin, was singularly fortunate in his female associations. In his case, Providence generously tempered the wind to the shorn lamb. There was no soul in the kingdom to whom it was of more consequence to engage the sympathies, and to enjoy the loving attentions, which woman alone can supply, than the shy, nerve-shaken, self-distrustful, ever-desponding author of *The Task*. No man needed a wife more than he did, and yet, as it happened, no man was better able to dispense with such a blessed appurtenance. Providence generously sent him splendid substitutes.

First of all came Mary Unwin. She, good creature, with that fine eye for a sorrow, and that generous longing to lighten suffering, which constitute one of woman's grandest prerogatives, saw, at a glance, that here was a life which might be cheered and unspeakably brightened by her ministrations; nay, a life which might be preserved from utter wreckage by her kindly interposition. In no spirit but one of pure and praiseworthy benevolence, so it is to be believed, did she accept the guardianship of this gentle but helpless, fibreless mortal. 'That woman,' said he, 'is a blessing to me, and I never see her without

being the better for her company' And when his madness broke out for the second time, the faithful Mary watched over him as his mother might have done, and spoke as tenderly to him as the maternal lips *would* have done had they still been endowed with 'language.' She was indeed his mother 'restored to life again.'

In the second place, Heaven was pleased to send him Lady Austen. She, a gay, brilliant, sparkling creature, took to the invalid poet at once, and quartered herself in the empty vicarage next door. Like Mrs. Unwin, too, she prompted him to literary work, suggesting, offhand, *The Sofa* by way of theme, as the beneficent Mary had urged him to *Table Talk*, and other productions. It is to her indirectly that we owe that universal legacy of amusement, the adventures of the 'linen-draper bold,' who has been laughed into immortality in the joyous ballad of *John Gilpin.*

To her succeeded the poet's cousin, Lady Hesketh, with whom he had formerly carried on a playful correspondence, brightened by some of the most charming letters in the language. Her advent excited such tumultuous pleasure that, for a time, his mind lost its balance, flinging him, strange to say, into one of his melancholy fits. Recovering from this mental visitation, he basked, for a period, in the sunshine she shed upon his path. And so the shy, sensitive bard had the rare fortune to win the regard and enjoy the loving attentions of three delightful women upon whom he had no marital, or even fraternal, claim.

It must be admitted, however, that the aristocrats of intellect don't always figure creditably in their relations to the sex. It is in fun, of course, that Mr. Leslie Stephen remarks, 'Never marry a man of genius: don't be his brother-in-law, or his publisher, or his editor, or anything that is his.' But in many of

their attachments they have taken unaccountable liberties with the Moral Law, and sinned against the social proprieties, as if they were no better than the earthiest of their race. Who can think, for instance, without surprise—not to use a more emphatic word—upon the numerous amours of the Jove of the German Olympus? He was almost as nefarious in his way as the Grecian Jupiter was in his. When upwards of forty the high priest of culture formed a connection with a country girl, destitute of education, and lived with her for a period of fifteen years in defiance of all nuptial laws, and of all that the German Mrs. Grundy could say. Her charms, limited as they were at best, gradually waned, and, to make matters worse, she contracted habits of intemperance. What misery she occasioned thereby to the man who had honoured, and, at the same time degraded, her by his preference it would be difficult to imagine; but when, in his fifty-eighth year, he resolved to make her his legitimate wife, the step involved a hideous sacrifice of personal respect, and a painful forfeiture of social position. Consequently, it may be hoped that it was taken in a spirit of contrition, and with a view to manly reparation. But is it not startling to think that this majestic, many-minded, much-worshipped genius allied himself at last to a frail, fat, coarse, illiterate daughter of the ditch, when he might probably have mated with the fairest and cleverest of the land?[1]

[1] Goethe's 'treatment of women, generally,' writes Sir Francis H. Doyle, 'and of Madame Von Stein in particular, does not please me. The one plea I cannot accept (I doubt whether he would have accepted it himself) is the extenuating circumstance, that though he may have broken her heart, he attended to her stomach, and constantly sent her from his own table (a table at which he was sitting with the rival woman he had literally picked out of the street) portions of any dish that pleased his own palate. A more ridiculous and sordid apology never, I should say, had been put forward on behalf of a faithless lover.'—*Reminiscences and Opinions of Sir Francis H. Doyle*, p. 231.

Silly beyond expression was Hazlitt's passion for the tailor's daughter, Sarah Walker. As we read the story, we seem to recall some wild outrageous dream evoked by pain and laudanum. It taxes not only faith, but credulity, to admit that a man of talent, gifted with the smallest modicum of common sense, and with half a century of experience on his head already, could have stooped to such petulant peculiarities as he himself has recorded. That he should have written, still more printed and published, a book in which the details of this nauseous amour are given, without a blush, is a fact of striking significance. The girl was very much his inferior in mind and station, being little more than a household drudge. One single impulse of pride, if no other feeling had been concerned, should have induced him either to crush his passion or conceal his pangs from observation. But the miserable wooer, whilst enraged by her indifference, could not summon up resolution to forego his frenzied suit. His wife was living, but he was attempting to obtain a divorce in Scotland. His proceedings were madly inconsistent. In vain he tore off the girl's locket, containing some of her hair, which he carried round his neck, and then dashed it furiously on the floor; equally so, that he shivered a little image of his idol Napoleon because she rejected it as a present; for the infatuated man soon found himself gathering up the fragments, and sending them to her (after kissing them repeatedly) 'as pieces of a broken heart to be kept in remembrance of the unhappy Farewell.' The interviews with his charmer (he lodged in her father's house) were supremely ridiculous, for sometimes she would not enter the room, but stood at the door parrying his rhapsodical addresses; and if she ventured to advance, Hazlitt conducted himself in a fashion so absurd that he seemed to have utterly forgotten his dignity as a man. 'I rose up, offered her an

arm-chair, bowed on it, and knelt to her, adoring.' Such a love-sick swain, such a brain-sick suitor, was scarcely ever to be found except amongst the natives of Noodledom.

Far higher names, indeed, than Hazlitt's have figured in the roll of foolish wooers. Dante's passion for Beatrice was more decorously displayed, and more elegantly and musically expressed. But if we are bound to believe the story told in the *Vita Nuova*, instead of accepting it as an allegory depicting his courtship of Philosophy, or some other honourable abstraction, must we not feel surprised, notwithstanding all we know of the vagaries of love, that a grown-up man should devote a whole treatise to the celebration of a childish fancy? That a boy of nine might fall in love, after a fashion, with a girl of eight, is as possible as that he should conceive a strong passion for a pony, or she for a poodle. But when they grow up, if sensible people, they either become ashamed of themselves or marry; they don't think of asking the ear of the world for the recital of their foolish little affair. It ought to be their own business exclusively. In Dante's case the ridiculous element is sadly prominent. For nine years he played the simpering adorer in secret; but chancing, at length, to meet his charmer in the street, she favoured him with a salutation (the very hour recorded) which threw him into a state of mental intoxication, and led to illusions wherein he saw Love seize the fair lady and ascend with her to heaven! Either the young lady was approachable or not. If the former, why did he not apply for her hand, and settle down into the monotony of married bliss? If the latter, there was an end of the matter practically, and though perfectly free to sigh and groan, and even to gnash his teeth in private, every feeling of self-respect should have constrained him to keep his passion secret instead of parading it

before the public. It is difficult to view such revelations, if genuine, with much respect. However musically a lover may moan in verse, and however much his readers may enjoy his melodious agonies, there is ever in such cases an under-current of contempt which it is impossible to suppress. Not that you fail to appreciate his disappointment, not that you deny him your sympathy so far as he has genuine cause for distress; but you expect him to play the man, and if you find him puling like a child, and begging the world to regard him as a prodigy of misfortune, you feel disposed to tell him not to 'put his finger in his eye,' but to look out for another sweetheart as soon as possible.

Most men who run through two or three affections—perhaps more—before they marry would feel reluctant to publish all the incidents which marked each affair for the entertainment of their acquaintance. But, at any rate, when Beatrice Portinari wedded Simone dei Bardi, and still more when Dante Alighieri wedded Gemma dei Donati, there was an end to all further philandering in prose, and, delicacy might have suggested, in poetry as well.

Pretty much the same view may be taken of another great master of the lyre. As Anacreon's instrument answered to love only, whenever its chords were stirred, so Petrarch's could do little more than make music in honour of Laura alone. His harp seemed to have but one string. He was the Paganini of poets. 'But,' said Campbell, 'though I edited his Memoirs, he was a detestable donkey. The fellow must have been mad, or a fool, or a liar. The latter is most probable.' This, we must admit, was not pretty or respectful language to employ. If the Italian sonneteer could be ranked with the long-eared brethren, none of the tribe have ever uttered a more graceful or melodious bray. Campbell was probably right in assuming that the story

of Petrarch's love for Laura was untrue, but we generally call these poetical misrepresentations 'fictions' instead of 'lies,' and society crowns the man with laurel instead of relegating him to the place where dogs and sorcerers and other disreputable beings abound.

Much has been written in palliation of the errors and follies of genius in matters amatory. Mr. Lewes, in speaking of Goethe's heartless amours, says, 'Genius has an orbit of its own. Its orbit is not necessarily eccentric, although it must often appear so, because its sweep is wide. Sometimes it disregards domestic duties, and minor morals, in obeying the law of its own movements. Hence genius and morality are not always synonymous.' It seems difficult to believe that this can have been seriously penned. No proposition can well be clearer, both as a principle of natural law as well as of intuitive equity, that a man has no right to break from his orbit if, by so doing, he injures others. If the planet Jupiter were to claim the privilege of travelling out of his path, all the other members of the Solar system would be entitled to remonstrate. We terrestrials should be justified in saying to him, 'You are a big bouncing fellow, no doubt, and have the lead in the matter of gravitation, but that is the very reason why you ought to keep to your regular courses. We can't have you drawing us out of our tracks, and overpowering us by your superior force; still less can we permit you (if we can help it) to go bumping against other bodies and annexing them to your own portly frame. It might be all very well for yonder little fellow of an asteroid (twenty miles in diameter) to wander out of his path because he cannot do much damage, and before long he would find himself captured by some superior mass. But you must really observe order and decorum just as much as that lively little Mercury, or your own obedient

well-conducted moons. Plainly, if you are to sally out upon the rampage whenever you like, the whole set of us will soon be thrown into confusion, and our illustrious Primary will have to call us all in, yourself included, and finally incorporate us with his own burning mass.'

Or, to put the question upon a more human footing, might not any pickpocket, specially eminent in his profession, say precisely the same thing? 'Gentlemen,' he might argue, 'I am a genius in my way—a perfect George Barrington in my art. I have a wonderful knack of getting at people's purses. I can spirit your watch out of your fob, or even charm the diamond ring from your finger, without your knowing that you are being plundered; and if you caught me, and if Mr. Lewes were living, I am sure he would say, "Let that man alone; he is a born cut-purse, and has therefore an orbit of his own. If he takes every shilling I possess, he is simply obeying the law of his inspiration. I should not therefore dream of prosecuting him. I would not even complain to the police. My doctrine of genius must be consistently held, and as the sweep of this chevalier's orbit appears to be exceptionally wide, we are bound to accept this fact as a sufficient apology for every felony he may commit."' Need it be said that all light-fingered gentry would revel in this philosophy, and straightway purchase copies of Mr. Lewes' life of Goethe as one of the very text-books of their tribe? However charitable therefore it might be to write tenderly about the errors of pickpockets and housebreakers, many of whom exhibit a wonderful amount of ability in their exploits, and travel in ample ellipses of their own, we have happily the common sense to run them into gaol as soon as captured, and are rarely known to shed a tear or heave a sigh over their fate, however brilliantly they may have sinned.

In fact, the question thus raised involves one of those startling fallacies which would scarcely be credible did we not suspect that ours must be one of the perversest worlds in creation. If genius is to claim any exemption from the ordinary laws of action, upon which side and in what direction should the privilege work? Is the possessor of this gift entitled to be weaker, feebler, more despicable, more vicious than the rest of mankind? Or is he bound to be stronger, nobler, loftier, more honourable than those to whom the glittering prerogative has been denied? There can surely be no room for doubt here. There will certainly be none in Heaven's judgment hall. To assume that the larger the intellect God has given to a man, the less common sense he may be expected to display; the more the Almighty has lifted him up above his fellow-creatures, the less he is bound by the laws of prudence and virtue, is surely a marvellous subversion of all the rules of reason, and a doctrine which we might fancy would flourish nowhere but in the atmosphere of an asylum. What would any bench of magistrates think of a drunk-and-disorderly offender, brought straight from the gutter, if he were to claim instant discharge on the ground that he was a spirit from heaven, and therefore privileged to get tipsy in any planet he chose to visit? The bench would not do its duty unless it fined the fellow smartly, and administered the most telling reproof in its power. And yet what are the pleas in favour of dissolute genius, but an assertion that if an angel were to settle amongst us, he ought to be at liberty, in virtue of his superior intellect, to get drunk, to compose ribald verses, to write licentious dramas, to publish sceptical works, to borrow money never to be returned, to burden his acquaintances with his support, and, generally, to play the profligate to any extent he thought proper?

But bad as this doctrine may appear, there are apologists who seem to intimate that many of these evil doings are in some way or other the direct product of genius itself! Those who entertain such an idea must surely be of opinion that superior intelligence is the gift of the devil, and that instead of being a hallowed light from heaven, it is a mocking meteor which lures its victims right into the fires of Tophet.

In short, one of the last pleas for vice which will pass muster at the Great Tribunal will be the plea of genius. Indeed, it will never be heard there at all, for no soul will have the audacity to allege that, just in proportion as it was favoured above its fellows, it deemed itself entitled to descend below their level, and to approximate to the imbecile or the brute.

Let Charity indeed in such cases have all the licence she can reasonably claim, but she will not certainly ask it at the expense of her holy sister Truth. The virtues do not commonly quarrel with each other, and there must be something wrong in our reasoning whenever they are brought into seeming, still more into actual, collision. Ever in this world we need to uphold the vital doctrine that duty and responsibility are in exact proportion to power and endowment; and that failure in the former is culpable in precisely the same degree as the latter is marked and unquestionable.

CHAPTER XIV.

VALHALLA IN VIEW.

IT is given to few people to retire to bed one night obscure and unprized, and, on rising next morning, to find themselves famous for ever in the literature of the land. This happened, as we know, to a young man, who, though a peer and a poet, was so lone in London that he had to frequent taverns and coffee-houses instead of clubs and drawing-rooms, and so unfriended that he could hardly meet with a sponsor on his introduction to the House of Lords. Yet, in the magic revolution of a few hours, this forlorn youth learnt that the eyes of all the intelligent in the metropolis were searching for him, that every door in the gay regions of fashion was open to him, and that the one word which was syllabled by almost every cultivated tongue, and this, too, in accents of admiration, was the word 'Byron.'

Some books acquire instant popularity from the nature of the subject. A work like *Les Caractères* of La Bruyère must have claimed immediate attention when it was rumoured that each prominent man might find his mental portrait there; or, what was better and far more enjoyable, his neighbour's, limned to the life, with all its moles, and pimples, and wrinkles elaborately displayed. It is no wonder that several editions of the work were run off in a few years, that the publisher's

daughter, to whom the profits were given, received sufficient to constitute a handsome dowry, and that the author found himself surrounded by a host of adversaries who had been grievously stung—many undesignedly—by his satirical shafts.

Rousseau's *New Héloïse* produced a perfect frenzy in all classes of French society. The booksellers could not print fast enough for the devouring public. Copies were let out at twelve sous a volume, the book to be returned at the expiration of a single hour. Enthusiasts would kiss any scrap of paper on which he had scribbled a few lines, or pay a large price for any glass out of which he had drunk a drop! Marvellous to say, even fine ladies who had commenced the perusal of the work when prepared for a ball, would actually forget their object, and even forego the amusement altogether in order to spend the whole night over the all-absorbing production. Bearing in mind that dames like those of the French court would have driven through storm and tempest, over quicksands or powder-magazines, across battle-fields and burning cities, rather than relinquish a projected dance—this was assuredly a wonderful tribute to the enchantments of the book.

Fontenelle, again, having written some pastoral pieces, the French courtiers were smitten with a passion for rural life. Such a result may easily be imagined amongst the artificial lords and ladies who were always in search of new sensations, and who would have paid a handsome price, like the Oriental monarch (name unverified unless it were Sardanapalus), to the inventor of a really original pleasure. There is a strong disposition in the frivolous part of the human race to convert existence into a picnic affair whenever this can be done, and especially to look upon the planet as a sort of excursion-ground, where you can romp, play all sort of games, and empty sundry hampers to the music

of flying corks and the fizzing of effervescent drinks. The idea of exchanging the monotonous formalities of a court, and the jaded jollities of Parisian society, for the freedoms of the country, charmed the butterfly throng. They conceived a sudden fancy for the woods and meadows. Lords dressed themselves up like shepherds. Ladies discarded their gay millinery, and appeared as simpering shepherdesses. Sheep were bought for pets, and lambs, fed with dainties, were almost fondled to death. Then there were milk-maids of high birth, who probably learned for the first time from what quadruped milk was definitely drawn. The facilities for merriment and increased flirtation which such a life presented, invested it with peculiar fascinations for the frivolous creatures who clustered round the pleasure-seeking monarch of France.

It was something, it was transcendently much, indeed, at a court like that of Louis the Superb, for the monarch to be seen walking arm in arm on the terrace with Molière—Molière the actor, Molière the royal valet, Molière the very bed-maker to His Majesty, but still Molière the greatest dramatic composer in all France. Looked at, indeed, from a courtier's point of view, could there be a greater compliment paid to Intellect than the admission of this same Molière to breakfast with his sovereign; the latter actually carving the fowl with his own kingly hands, and talking familiarly to his guest with his own consecrated tongue?

In the sixteenth century there was a poet, Accolti of Arrezzo, whose fame was so great that, according to Sismondi, the shops were closed when he announced his intention of reciting in public, and crowds, including prelates of the first water, and Swiss troops (who accompanied him as a guard of honour) flocked to hear his verses. Dryly, very dryly, Mr. Roscoe

remarks, that if these compositions had only perished, his reputation might have been considered complete!

Richardson published his *Clarissa* by detachments. During the progress of the work, the public grew so interested in the fortunes of his characters that he was plied with letters requesting information about them, just as if they were real personages whose fate was entirely in his hands. When he had plunged some of them into scrapes, he was implored to deal leniently with the sinners, and by no means to visit them with the extreme penalties of suffering. Even his worst character, the profligate Lovelace, was strongly recommended to mercy. Some of his correspondents admitted that an example *might* properly be made of him, but begged that he should be let off under the plea of extenuating circumstances, and with a view to his possible reformation. Richardson, however, was inexorable. He reproved his lady friends for their unseemly advocacy. He resolved to administer justice with rhadamanthine impartiality. Virtue should not be outraged with impunity—not if he knew it—and vice should certainly smart for its iniquities. Therefore, when the fitting hour arrived, he passed sentence upon the fascinating villain, and had him disposed of with the stern fidelity which the author's position as the censor of morals required.

An obscure writer having ventured to usher Pamela into high life, and to describe her adventures in a more exalted sphere, the genuine parent of that virtuous lady felt compelled—pleasingly so, no doubt, and to the great joy of his female worshippers—to take up the wondrous tale himself, and work it out on his own lines. But who would not like to have witnessed the gratified gleam in Richardson's eyes when he heard that a little coterie in a northern village, having finished the perusal of the story, expressed their joy at the happy

dénouement by rushing to the church and ringing the bells in honour of the event!

Daniel de Foe must have roared with delight when he found that his *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*—gravely recommending that Nonconformists should be exterminated by banishing every one who attended conventicles, and hanging the preachers—was received by some of the gravest Churchmen with unquestioning approval; so much so, that one eminent divine spoke of it as the most 'valuable' piece of literature he possessed 'next to the Holy Bible and the sacred comments.' It is not a little singular also to note that when the same writer dealt with one of the most awful of tragedies, namely, the Great Plague, he imposed upon his readers with almost equal success, for who does not peruse it as a stern narrative of facts, whereas it is, for the most part, a journal of pure fiction?

Swift, too, doubtless indulged in many a grim smile at the cheateries of his compositions. Perhaps that arch wag would have laughed his loudest could he have learned how often people were imposed upon by the superhuman gravity of his productions, just as Lady Berkeley was by his *Meditations on a Broomstick*. Dr. Arbuthnot lent *Gulliver's Travels* to an old gentleman, who, after reading a portion, went to his map to look for Lilliput. The master of a ship declared that he was well acquainted with Captain Gulliver, but that it was a mistake on the printer's part to describe him as resident at Rotherhithe, whereas he lived at Wapping. Mr. Fortescue, afterwards Master of the Rolls, informed Mr. Pope that one Lemuel Gulliver had lost a cause on the Western Circuit, because he had the reputation of being a notorious liar! An Irish judge seriously stated (as if the veracity of the worthy captain's adventures *might* come within the compass of judicial inquiry) that, whatever other persons might

think of the book, he regarded it as a tissue of improbabilities. Considering the colossal extravagance of the incidents with which Gulliver deals, were not these greater tributes to Swift's powers of *vraisemblance* than the one paid to De Foe by the Exeter alderman, who read through *Robinson Crusoe* under the inpression that the book was as true for him as the *Voyages of Captain Cook* are to us?

There is a story told, touching the once renowned romance of *Amadis of Gaul*, to the effect that a certain knight, on returning from the chase one day, found his wife and daughter, with their female attendants, all in tears. Naturally alarmed at this display of lamentation, he inquired what calamity had happened. It must surely be some fearful disaster which choked them with grief. The first who found utterance replied, 'Sir, Amadis is dead!'

Mr. Forster gives a curious anecdote of the interest excited by *Pickwick* during its periodical issue. 'An Archdeacon (writes he), with his own venerable lips, repeated to me the other night a strange profane story of a solemn clergyman, who had been administering ghostly consolation to a sick person; having nished satisfactorily, as he thought, and got out of the room, he heard the sick person ejaculate, "Well, thank God, *Pickwick* will be out in ten days any way!" This is dreadful.' Whilst Marryat's *Japhet in Search of a Father* was continuing its course in the pages of a magazine, an American vessel, meeting an English one on the broad Atlantic, ran up the question to the masthead, 'Has Japhet found his father yet?'[1]

Reynolds took up Johnson's *Life of Savage*, during a visit to Devonshire, and began to read it, with one arm resting on the

[1] *Captain Marryat's Life*, by Florence Marryat, p. 213.

mantel-piece: so captivated was he with the work that he went through the whole of it without changing his position, and then found, on attempting to move, that the limb was completely benumbed. A similar incident is said to have occurred to Sir W. Hamilton, when Carlyle's *French Revolution* appeared, for the great metaphysician, leaning upon his elbow in like fashion, felt himself spirited away in thought by a magical power he could not resist, being drawn, spite of himself, into that hideous Inferno of colossal shapes, and revolting phantasms, which no other writer has so vividly described.

Ariosto, whilst travelling amongst the mountains, was once taken prisoner by some banditti. No sooner had they learnt his name than the robbers expressed their profound admiration for a poet with whose works they were well acquainted, and politely offered to escort him anywhere without even plundering him of a ducat. This marvellous act of forbearance by-the-bye might well console the author for the remark made by his patron (Cardinal Ippolito), to whom he had dedicated his celebrated poem, the *Orlando*, a work which cost him ten years of labour. 'Where in the world,' exclaimed the cardinal, after reading the book, 'did you contrive to pick up such a heap of absurdities?' The Greek dramatist Euripides extorted a very unique, but very flattering, testimony to his merits. The Sicilians having taken a number of prisoners, discharged all who could rehearse any verses from that author. So great was the repute of Plato that women attended his lectures in men's clothes. Many were the compliments paid to the commanding talents of Socrates, not only by eager disciples, but by distinguished philosophers who visited Athens to profit by his teachings. Antisthenes might be seen trudging in from the port Piræus every day to listen to the great Master of Wisdom; and time after time the citizens might

have seen, what appeared to be an old woman with lowered veil stealthily entering the city at night, and proceeding at once to the dwelling of Socrates, leaving it next day with similar precautions. No female was this, however, but a very masculine entity —Euclid of Megara—who was risking his life in every visit; for the Megareans and the Athenians were at bitter feud, and the latter had declared death against any of the former who presumed to set foot in Attica, whilst the others in turn had sworn to ravage the territories of their foes twice per annum.

Pindar was still more highly honoured, for it appears that the priestess at Delphi received a message from Apollo (equivalent we may suppose to a royal command) directing that the poet should share in the first-fruits offered at his shrine annually, one half to the mortal, the other half to the God of the Golden Bow! There is much difference of opinion as to the age at which the bard of the resounding lyre went over to the majority; but it is to be hoped that for numerous years he enjoyed the benefit of this glorious partnership; for though the existence of the deity in question might be somewhat mythical, the offerings themselves would be decidedly substantial. Marcus Aurelius, who, if an Emperor, was also an author as well as a philosopher, was so much respected for his writings and his virtues, that after his death his image was to be seen in almost every house in Rome.

Returning to Weimar on one occasion after a lengthy absence, Goethe was conducted to a new house erected on a scale of much magnificence, and adorned with paintings, classic busts, vases and statuettes, as well as enriched with cabinets of gems, engravings, and other curiosities. This elegant mansion, he was told, was his own. It was a present from the Grand

Duke, who intended it as a graceful and generous surprise for the courtly poet.

One of the most dazzling instances of success was that of Lope de Vega, the Phœnix of Spanish literature. Such was his fame that people ran out to see him in the streets; he was styled the 'Prodigy of Nature'; a writer who dared to censure his works was declared worthy of death; his name became a kind of superlative, and to call a horse a Lope horse, or a book a Lope book, was to express the summit of excellence. One day a splendid funeral procession composed of the noblest of Spain passed through the streets of Madrid. 'What a Lope funeral!' said a person newly arrived in the capital. It was that of the idolised dramatist himself!

It was a proud day for Thorwaldsen, when, working his way up from the office of a carver of figure-heads for ships to the position of rival of the celebrated Canova, he returned to his native land, from which he had been absent, with a slight exception, for upwards of forty years. That day was converted into a national holiday. Royalty did him honour. Poets made verses in his praise. All the chivalry of Denmark assembled to grace his triumph, and crowds of his admiring countrymen rang out their shouts of welcome as one of the purest of modern sculptors passed through the streets of Copenhagen.

If the shades of the departed could look in upon us mortals at pleasure, the spirit of Boccaccio would have been much surprised had it paid a visit to the Duke of Roxburghe's mansion in St. James' Square on a certain day in the month of May 1812. There it would have witnessed a grand fight over the famous Valdarfer copy of the *Decameron*. Three British noblemen, the Marquis of Blandford, Earl Spencer, and the Duke of Devonshire were eager to possess a volume which was

precious from its rarity. Dibdin gives an amusing account of the fray at the auction, which, opening with a tentative bid of 100 guineas, continued until the two first-named noblemen were left in exclusive possession of the field. All minor combatants having dropped out of the conflict before a thousand guineas had been reached, it then became a duel *à outrance*. The crowded throng of dilettanti and bibliopoles watched the battle with breathless interest. Released from suspense for a moment after each bid, the return stroke was awaited amidst profound silence and with ever-deepening curiosity.

As the combat grew closer and closer between the two heroes, the spectators became as excited as if they had been gazing upon a mortal struggle in a Roman amphitheatre or on a wager of battle under the mediæval dispensation. But when, after reaching £2000, Lord Spencer made a rush at his opponent as if to overwhelm him by a desperate lunge, and offered £2250, all the heart was taken out of him by his opponent's calm parry and cool exclamation—'£10 more!'

As we shall see, Boccaccio had much reason to regret that he ever wrote that book, and it is tolerably clear that no copy, Valdarfer or otherwise, will be found in any library in Heaven; but as far as things terrestrial go, this scene was certainly a colossal compliment to the defunct author.

Still more pointed, however, was the homage paid to Boccaccio's worthier countryman. The time came when Dante's great poem was ordered to be read in all churches, like the Scriptures; when it was made the subject of more commentaries than any other work except the Bible; and when any person who was found ignorant of it was denounced as a brute devoid of reason (*uomo senza ragione e bestiale*). But this time did not

arrive until some half century after the weary, tempest-tossed poet had set out to explore in person the mysteries of one at least of the worlds he had so vividly depicted.

Next to fame the successful writer frequently—we will not say generally—ranks the question of profit.

There have been few writers like Byron, who fancied that it scarcely became him to receive money for his works. This view he announced on the publication of *Childe Harold*, when he superbly presented the copyright to Mr. Dallas; but on finding what a lucrative well of poetry there was within him, he very sensibly rescinded his resolution, and found ample room in his coffers for the £70,000 which his compositions are calculated to have produced.

Swift, the most commanding author of his day, states in a letter to Pulteney (1735), that he 'never got a farthing for anything he writ except once, and that by Mr. Pope's prudent management.' 'People,' remarked Scott, 'may say this and that of the pleasure of fame, or of profit, as a motive of writing; I think the only pleasure is in the actual exertion and research, and I would no more write upon any other terms than I would hunt merely to dine upon hare soup. At the same time, if credit and profit came unlooked for, I would no more quarrel with them than with the soup.' Every author has a right to the joy which composition confers; he has a right also to the satisfaction which well-earned wages secure. But these enjoyments, it must be admitted, are purely personal, however honourable in themselves, and surely the great Wizard could not have forgotten the grander motive which should inspire every wielder of the pen, namely, the pleasure and profit of his readers —for had not he, more than any of his contemporaries, conferred a magnificent donation of delight upon mankind?

It would be a fine thing for authors if they could occasionally meet with over-conscientious readers, such as Thomson the poet found in Quin the actor. Whilst the bard of *The Seasons* was impounded in a bailiff's den for debt, the latter paid him a visit, and ordered a supper from a neighbouring tavern, with a plentiful supply of claret. The meal being concluded, Quin quietly remarked that it was time to balance accounts. 'The pleasure I have had in perusing your works,' said he, 'I cannot estimate at less than a £100, and I insist on now acquitting the debt.' Without waiting for a word either of remonstrance or of gratitude from the astonished author, the actor laid down the money and took his departure. Was not this a beautiful bit of business? There was the self-constituted debtor simply come to discharge his pleasing score. He would not even trouble his creditor to make out his bill. All he wanted to know, like Mr. Mantalini, was the 'blessed' total. Mr. Mantalini, it will be remembered, used a much less elegant, though, we must admit, a far more emphatic adjective; but Quin actually took the trouble of making an estimate, and doing all his creditor's bookkeeping himself. Could a generous deed have been accomplished in a more graceful fashion, or under more timely conditions? If all writers who have conferred hours of enjoyment upon the public could have a similar reckoning with their readers, what a royalty such men as Scott and Dickens, Burns and Tennyson, Macaulay and Carlyle would have received! If, as Lord Dudley said, on hearing of Sir Walter's misfortunes, every man who had but drawn a day's delight from his writings, would subscribe a shilling, the author of the Waverley Novels would rise some morning the richest individual in the kingdom.

Was there ever a more curious tribute paid to a mortal than Mr. Constable's proposed application to the Bank of England,

for an advance of £100,000 (it might be £200,000) upon Scott's existing and future productions; in other words, for a mortgage upon that man's brain? It was as much as to say to the directors 'not houses or land, not mines of coal or copper, not even gold placers or diamond allotments, do I offer you, gentlemen, as security for this large advance; but I put in pledge the genius of a single individual who has already passed the meridian of existence, and who has perhaps not more than a dozen years of life to run.'

It is told of Lieutenant Howard, the author of some sea novels as well as sea biographies—one of the former, *Rattlin the Reefer*, having been edited by Captain Marryat—that one day he received an unsigned letter, requesting him to go at a certain time to a certain spot at a certain distance from London. He kept the anonymous assignation, but nothing was to be seen except a carriage, which drove off immediately upon his appearance. A second summons led to a similar result. Mocked as he felt himself to be, he was in no humour to pay much attention to a third letter, which shortly afterwards arrived, and apparently from the same mysterious quarter. Fortunately he did not put it into the fire unopened, for it was found to contain bank-notes to the amount of thirty thousand pounds! He died in 1842, without ever learning to whom he was indebted for this delightful but unexplained outbreak of benevolence.

Profit, however, bears no settled proportion to merit, and it is equally equivocal in its relation to labour. Rousseau says of his trashy interlude *The Village Soothsayer*, which cost him five or six weeks of light work, that it produced him nearly as much money as the *Emile*, which cost him twenty years of composition.

Miss Austen's novels have been praised by judges of the highest authority. Sir Walter Scott states that her talent for describing ordinary every-day people, with their feelings and entanglements, was the most wonderful he had ever known. Southey said that her tales were truer to nature, and contained passages of finer feeling, than any others of his age. Miss Mitford declared she would almost cut off one of her hands if that would enable her to write like Jane Austen with the other. Coleridge, Mackintosh, Sydney Smith, Dr. Whewell, Archbishop Whately, all spoke in terms of enthusiastic admiration of the writer whose power of characterisation has been likened to that of Shakespeare; whilst Lord Macaulay proposed to write her memoir, and edit her works, with a view to the erection of a monument to her memory in Winchester Cathedral. The Prince Regent (more of an authority upon coats and cravats) was a great admirer of her novels, and kept a set at each of his residences. Yet her march to fame was of the slowest. Few approving voices were to be heard from the crowd, who would have been in ecstasies had Fanny Burney or Maria Edgeworth passed by in literary state. Nor were publishers more appreciative than the public. Cadell, without ever glancing at the manuscript, refused to bring out *Pride and Prejudice*, even at the author's risk. *Northanger Abbey* was sold to a bookseller at Bath for ten pounds only, but he thought so meanly of his bargain, that he kept the work in his drawer for many years, and ultimately returned it on being repaid the price. When she received £150 for her *Sense and Sensibility*, she regarded this sum as a magnificent harvest for her brain, and her nephew calculates that the whole pecuniary produce of her pen realised during life, did not exceed four hundred pounds.[1]

[1] *Memoir of Jane Austen*, by her Nephew J. Austen Leigh, chaps. vii., viii., and ix.

Mr. Ruskin, it is well known, has his own little eccentric theory as to the literary market. He thinks it would be well if no book could be sold under a guinea. He considers that, as an intellectual counsellor, he has as much right to a satisfying fee as a solicitor to his 6s. 8d., or a physician to his guinea. The 'Oxford Graduate' is an exceptional writer, and might therefore, if words are to be valued according to their intrinsic worth, fairly claim an exceptional price. If a great doctor or a great lawyer, or a great architect, or a great charlatan of any description, is at liberty to increase his fees as he increases his reputation, the author of *The Stones of Venice* might righteously demand a sovereign instead of a crown for any thin duodecimo he produced. But the marketing of literature rests upon a footing of its own. The more volumes you can dispose of, the better for the writer and the public as well as the publisher. If Mr. Ruskin's *Great Painters* had been published at a hundred guineas, how many copies would have been sold? Probably not fifty. His fame would have been considerably circumscribed. His purchasers would have been mostly purse-proud dilettanti or æsthetic drawing-room dames. His subsequent productions would therefore have attracted few readers. His influence would have been comparatively small, and thousands who have been charmed and instructed by his eloquent compositions would have known him only as a name, even if they had known him at all.

Just the reverse was the view of Mr. R. H. Horne, who published his *Orion*, an epic, at the ridiculous price of one farthing. There was much jesting in consequence; for what critic could resist the temptation of inquiring whether that was the value the author put upon his own production?—and even little boys could fling down a copper on a bookseller's counter, and ask 'for a pennyworth of epics.' Possibly Mr. Horne regarded

the step as a contemptuous experiment upon the public, or as a satirical intimation that a farthing a-piece was all it could spare, for the highest of poetical efforts; but as he increased the price of succeeding editions, he probably concluded that a joke should not be unduly prolonged, particularly at a ruinous price.

But what golden successes many other writers have achieved! It would be dangerous to speak of the £20,000 which Lord Macaulay's publishers are said to have paid him for his famous *History*, and rash to answer for the perfect sanity of any young author, with large expectations, who should be favoured with an inspection of that heavenly cheque or a *facsimile* thereof.

Charles Dickens, commencing his career without a patrimonial shilling, died worth £93,000 in real and personal property. He netted some £20,000 by his American labours alone. At the period of his death, says Mr. Forster, a new work by him might have been safely calculated to produce £10,000. The sum paid down by Mr. Chapman for *Edwin Drood* (as Mr. Yates relates) was £7,500, but this was for 25,000 copies, whereas 50,000 were printed within a very limited period.[1] After 'Boz' had fairly caught the public ear, he discovered that he had parted with his earlier compositions for a comparatively unworthy sum. He underwent considerable trouble in repurchasing copyrights from one publisher and in disentangling himself from another. To buy back his *Sketches* from Macrone, for which he received £150, he had to lay down £2000, the value of the copyright having apparently increased upwards of thirteen times within little more than as many months.[1]

From Murray, Washington Irving, stranger as he was to the British public in the first instance, received not less than £10,000

[1] *Yates' Recollections and Experiences*, ii. p. 125.

for his writings. Without ever seeing the manuscript, the publisher paid £1000 for *Bracebridge Hall*, and £1500 for the *Tales of a Traveller*. From the same bountiful hand, and with equal faith in the author's efficiency, came £3150 for the *Life of Columbus*, and £2100 for the *Conquest of Granada*.

To few poets has it been given to exhibit a more brilliant balance-sheet than Voltaire. Not that his wealth was wholly or chiefly the produce of his brain, for he engaged in various prosaic undertakings which yielded him splendid returns in cash. His connection with the brothers Paris, the famous financiers, led to a contract for victualling the French armies, from which he reaped a rich harvest of profit; and his commercial enterprises at Cadiz were scarcely less productive, his special good fortune in this respect being indicated by the fact that, out of all the vessels in which he was interested, only one was captured by the English, in 1746. Longchamp, one of his secretaries, gives a statement of his income from rents, pensions, lotteries, etc., during 1749, nearly thirty years before his death, amounting to not less than 74,038 livres! In after years this amount was considerably increased. Such a rent-roll as the ill-famed Frenchman's would be enough to drive all Grub Street mad with envy.[1]

Whilst Victor Hugo's *Hernani* was in course of performance in Paris, and the customary anxieties attendant upon a first

[1] 'Ses porte-feuilles,' says Longchamp, 'étaient pleins de contrats, de lettres de change, de billets à terme, de reconnaissances, d'effets du Gouvernement. Il eût été difficile, sans doute,' continues he smartly, 'de trouver dans le porte-feuille d'aucun autre homme de lettres autant de manuscrits de cette espèce, et les poètes surtout voient rarement couler chez eux *le Pactole* avec *l'Hippocrène*.' Nor did he rely upon his own country for pecuniary contributions. London paid him £6250 by way of subscriptions to his *Henriade*, which surely was a generous deed on the part of perfidious Albion.—*Mémoires de Voltaire, et sur ses Ouvrages*, par Longchamp et Wagniere, vol. ii. p. 335.

representation had been wellnigh extinguished by the thunders of applause which greeted the fourth act, the author was informed that he was pressingly wanted outside for a few moments. He found a little bustling man, who announced himself as the partner of M. Baudoin, the publisher, and stated they were anxious to purchase the play. They offered 6000 francs. Hugo replied that he was ready to deal with the applicant after the performance was over; suggesting, very honourably, that success might not be so complete as the executed acts seemed to imply. 'Ah, that is true,' was the answer, 'but it may be much greater. At the second act I thought of offering 2000 francs; at the third act I got up to 4000; I now, at the fourth act, offer 6000 (£240), and after the fifth I am afraid I should have to say 10,000.'. "Well,' said Hugo, enchanted, no doubt, by this marvellous display of candour, 'if you have so little fear about the play, you shall have it: come to-morrow morning, and we can settle the matter.' 'If it is the same thing to you,' persisted the little bustling man,' I should prefer settling it at once. I have got the 6000 francs in my pocket.' The two entered a shop close at hand, and procured a sheet of stamped paper. The contract was written and signed on the counter, and the author received the money, which was by no means unacceptable, as he had not more than fifty francs in his possession. So conflicting, however, were the views entertained respecting the merits of this drama, that the metropolis was divided into hostile camps, and, speaking metaphorically, much literary bloodshed was the result. In the provinces, to which the quarrel soon extended, some veins were literally opened, for at Toulouse a young man fought a duel about *Hernani*, and was killed; whilst at Vannes, a corporal of dragoons died, leaving, by way of testamentary instruction, an injunction to inscribe on his tombstone the words, 'Here lies

one who believed in Victor Hugo.'[1] At one time there was such a run upon this author's brain-bank that publishers besieged him for fresh novels, and when he declared his inability to meet their demands, they begged him to give them a title merely, in order that they might announce some forthcoming production from his pen.

But what will many a poor dramatist say to the following appetising statement of the profits arising from a single production? If there were such things as pecuniary glands in an author's physique, would they not be incited to wild activity by the mere perusal? 'I have been furnished,' says Mr. E. Yates, 'by a worthy friend of mine, a writer of melodrama of the present day, whose name for obvious reasons I shall not mention, with a return of the fees which he has received for one piece alone, which, at the time of writing, are within £150 of a total of ten thousand pounds, and which are still rolling in at the rate of £100 a week. In this return, America, really unknown in earlier days as a money-producer for the English dramatist, figures for £800 more than London; the provinces, valued by Buckstone at a £10 note, yield nearly £3000; while Australia, at that time chiefly known as a receptacle for convicts, yields more than double the amount originally paid by my father for the whole acting copyright.'[2] Measured by length, the £900 given in value for the *Pleasures of Hope* might seem to be a prodigal price; for, as the poem consists of 1100 lines only, this was equivalent to little less than a pound a line. Some years ago the autograph *Elegy* of Gray was sold at an auction for £100, which was at the rate of more than £3 per stanza, but such immortal stanzas were well worth the hundred a-piece!

[1] *Life of Victor Hugo*, vol. i. p. 290.
[2] *Yates' Recollections and Experiences*, vol. i. p. 125.

Measured by merit, what shall be said of the beggarly £10 paid to Milton for *Paradise Lost*; the £20 to Goldsmith for his *Traveller*; and the £60 for the only really 'perpetual incumbent' ever known, namely the *Vicar of Wakefield*?

Sometimes failure and success are strangely intermingled. When Alexander Petöfi, the great Hungarian poet, published his national epic, the *Hero Janos*, it was coldly received in the capital (where he was earning a pitiful livelihood as a literary journeyman), and yielded him the beggarly sum of about fourteen shillings! But in the provinces it was received with shouts of applause, was translated into every patois in the kingdom, read by every peasant's fireside; and when, soon after, he went into the country, his journey was 'almost a triumphal progress. Everywhere he was waited upon by deputations and serenaders, and singled out for honours. The magistrates of the county of Gömör called on him in a body, and bestowed on him the title of Tablabira, thus raising the butcher's son to a rank that nobles envied.' The time came—and this before he had reached his twenty-fourth year—when, on appearing in a box at a theatre, the audience sprang to its feet and saluted him with the Hungarian 'All hail!'—and when he awoke each day it was to find himself the most popular of the national poets. 'He went nowhere but he heard his songs: when he retired to rest, they were the last voices of the evening; when he left his bed, they were the first strains of the morning.'[1]

Success, however, frequently assumes some very unsatisfactory forms. There are what we may call penalties of honour to pay.

Sir Walter Scott once received a packet fron New York containing a manuscript play entitled *The Cherokee Indians*,

[1] Curwen's *Song and Sorrow*, vol. i. p. 223-225.

written by a young lady who requested him in cold blood to read it right through ; also, to correct and prepare it for publication ; also, to secure its representation by the manager of Drury Lane ; also, to obtain a publisher, and, above all, to procure her a handsome price for the copyright! For this inhuman packet he of *Waverley* had actually to disburse £5 ! But this was not all. Within a few days afterwards he received another parcel containing a duplicate of the same drama, which, with inconsiderate barbarity, the authoress sent him also carriage unpaid ! For this again he had to draw out another bank-note. The writer expressed her fear that, as the weather had been tempestuous, her precious production might have gone down into that spiteful abyss where so much that is worthy as well as so much that is worthless may be supposed to lie buried for ever. The man who could bear up under such a visitation without fuming, stamping, storming, upsetting the ink, smashing some crockery, and performing other frantic feats—still more, who could indulge even in the sickliest of smiles, must have been a model of Christian fortitude, and a hero in the highest sense of the term. There are people in this world who think it perfectly right to fine their fellow-creatures for being amiable, and who hold that the penalty ought to go into their pockets, and be applied for their exclusive benefit. It is dangerous to do a good-natured turn to such iniquitous reasoners, for if they could have their own way they would go on mulcting you, periodically, during the remainder of your life, as if the virtue or the virus of one kindly deed could never be exhausted.

Another misery to which a popular author is exposed may be accounted positively charming by some, although regarded as intolerable by others. Says James Hogg (writing from London), 'I am sure I have received within the last three days three

hundred invitations to dinner, and I fear I have accepted too many of them. I accept on condition that there is not to be a party. "Oh no! there shall be no party—just a few friends, a family party!" Well, I go at seven o'clock; no fashionable dinners before that. By the time we get a few glasses of wine drunk, the rapping at the door begins, and continues without intermission for an hour and a half. Then we go up-stairs, and find both drawing-rooms crammed as full as ever you saw sheep in a fold. And then I am brought in and shown, like any other wild beast, all the ladies curtseying, and flattering, and begging for one shake of my hand. Such flummery I never saw in this world, and every night I am taken-in in this way.'[1]

The honours Dickens received on his first visit to the New World might have turned the stoutest head, and would certainly have driven many a *littérateur* out of his wits before he had been there a week. On arriving at Halifax, a 'breathless man,' shouting the novelist's name as he tore along, came on board, and introduced himself as the Speaker of the House of Assembly, insisting on carrying the visitor to the Governor's residence, and to both Houses of Parliament, where he was welcomed by 'judges, law-officers, bishops, and law-makers, and followed through the streets by huzzaing multitudes.' When the packet reached Boston a dozen individuals darted on board at the 'peril of their lives' before the vessel could be moored, and, rushing violently up, began to shake hands with him 'like madmen.' These, says Dickens, with a comical affectation of surprise (and he writes the word in capitals, as befits the awful profession), were actually EDITORS! Landed, he despaired of giving the faintest notion of his reception—of the crowds that trooped in and out when he was at the hotel; of the numbers that lined

[1] *Memorials of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd*, by Mrs. Gardner, p. 258.

the streets when he ventured out; of the cheering which arose when he made his appearance at the theatre; of the congratulatory letters and verses he received, to say nothing of the invitations to balls, dinners, and assemblies, with which he was overwhelmed.

At Hartford and Newhaven the committee clubbed together to pay all his expenses, and the landlords were instructed to deliver no bill; but the guest refused to budge an inch until he had discharged his score. On some occasions perhaps he might have accepted this little civility with great advantage; for, on settling his hotel account at New York for one fortnight, he wrote, 'We'—that is, himself and his wife—'have lived out every day, except when I was laid up with a sore throat, and only had in all four bottles of wine: the bill was £70 English!!!'

What public banquets he had to attend; what private parties he had to decline; what levées it was necessary to hold; how his portrait and bust were in demand; how severely he was interviewed by every inquisitive American—'I forget,' remarks he slily, 'the exact number of the nation'; how he had to engage a secretary to conduct his public correspondence, seeing that it was equal to that of an officer of State, is not all this written in the book of his life, by his friend John Forster?

'In fact,' says he, as if summing up his comical distresses, 'I can do nothing that I want to do, go nowhere where I want to go, and see nothing that I want to see. If I turn into the street, I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home, the house becomes, with callers, like a fair. If I visit a public institution with only one friend, the directors come down incontinently, waylay me in the yard, and address me in a long speech. I go to a party in the evening, and am so enclosed and

hemmed about by people, stand where I will, that I am exhausted for want of air. I dine out, and have to talk about everything to everybody. I go to church for quiet, and there is a violent rush to the neighbourhood of the pew I sit in, and the clergyman preaches at me. I take my seat in a railroad car, and the very conductor won't leave me alone. I get out at a station, and can't drink a glass of water without having a hundred people looking down my throat when I open my mouth to swallow. Conceive what all this is.'

Great allowance must, of course, be made for the tone of exaggeration which the great novelist adopted in describing his American reception. Inwardly, he would no doubt enjoy the flattering liberties which were taken with him, though these amounted to a total annihilation of all privacy. Many a Briton would be glad to undergo similar punishment at the hands of his transatlantic cousins, and to be half stifled with kindness or 'entirely kilt' by compliments.

But passing to another form of homage, let us observe the singular tribute which is regularly offered to the manes of Edward Gibbon. Remembering that one great purpose of his *Decline and Fall* was to damage the Christian religion by stealthy sap and solemn sneer, his fate has been one of the most provokingly complimentary which can be well conceived. Prophecy is, of course, one of the great pillars of the Faith. Its confirmation, as well as exposition, rests mainly upon historical facts. Now it would be difficult to take up any modern treatise on prophetic interpretation without finding that the writer had made use of Gibbon's monumental work as unimpeachable authority for his data. Man after man repairs to this quarry of erudition to support almost every argument he uses, and every conclusion he draws. If ever a poor soul must have been

maddened, could he have anticipated the use to which his writings would be put after his decease, it would surely have been Edward Gibbon. It is easy to imagine the intense chagrin, the knitting of the brow, the gnashing of the teeth, the pursing up of the 'round hole' which constituted his mouth, and the whistle of unspeakable indignation which that round hole would have emitted could he have seen with his mind's eye each expositor of prophecy repairing to the magnificent quarry he had opened, and coolly filling his vehicle with the solid materials required for his work in support of Christianity. Worse still, could he have seen the fellow return chapter after chapter to load again, and to complete any little buttress of the Faith by taking the very treasures which its antagonist had so unsuspectingly provided. But the most galling element in the case would be that whether these interpreters were right or wrong in their conclusions—whether their arguments corresponded with each other or differed as widely as the poles, all of them made it a point to resort to the same inexhaustible source! Nay, on second thoughts, a still more infuriating feature appears, viz., that amongst these toilers in the prophetic field there was a common compact to accept Gibbon's statements as perfectly reliable, simply because he was the known adversary of Christianity! The ordinary caution which an inquirer might have thought it his duty to exercise has generally been dispensed with on the strength of that very hostility! Would Gibbon have sworn, we wonder, if he could have foreseen all this? Probably he was too corpulent to have indulged in any imprecations, for souls which are incased in fatness are not much given to angry expletives, yet, to be used for generations as a kind of literary hodman by every student of prophecy; to be at the beck and call of every new theorist on the subject; to be required to carry bricks and

mortar for the last purpose in the world he wished to promote; or, changing the figure, to reflect that he would leave all his war material in the hands of the Faithful, and that they would go on battling for the truth age after age, with the weapons he fashioned and the ammunition he supplied—would not this have been a punishment which Dante might have pictured with horrible glee?

It can't be helped now, Edward Gibbon! Things must take their course.

Some works, again, have been so equivocally successful that penalties were attached to their perusal, whilst others were publicly burnt by the common hangman. That delightful book *Luther's Table Talk* was denounced by Gregory XIII., and at his instance the Emperor Rudolph II. decreed the punishment of death to all who should be found with a copy in their possession. So effectual was the prohibition that the work would have perished wholly had not some labourers, who were making certain excavations for a German gentleman of the name of Von Sparr, in the year 1626, discovered a packet carefully covered with bees' wax, and containing the only specimen which appears to have been in existence. When the genial and delightful volume was disinterred both Pope and Emperor were dust, and if their souls reached Heaven, as we would fain hope they did, they would assuredly meet the Arch-heretic there, probably with his still more daring translation of the Scriptures under his arm. What kind of greetings would pass, how people explain their little mundane misunderstandings there, or what apologies Pontiff and Kaiser would offer to the sainted Martin, it is difficult to imagine. A sprightly 'dialogue of the dead' might be written for the occasion, assuming that, after the wielders of the spiritual and secular swords had surmounted

their surprise, let us not say indignation, on finding the insubordinate monk in Paradise, and quite at home there, they could condescend to discuss the ecclesiastical troubles which had raged whilst on earth. But the forbidden volumes have triumphed over all opposition, and will hold their footing amongst men when historians have ceased to record that either Gregory or Rudolph ever existed. And, by the way, might not some very pleasant and profitable reading be found in publications which have been prohibited by Popes, burnt by executioners, condemned by the censors, rejected by the booksellers and disowned by the public? If some spirited publisher, gifted with much discretion, and assisted by wise and learned counsellors, could undertake the production of a series of this character, it would probably be found to contain some of the finest and raciest literature in the world. A library comprehending most of the works enumerated in the Index Expurgatorius would be a place to revel in, and a wit like Swift might find ample play for his genius in depicting a new *Battle of the Books.*

Occasionally success must be very surprising even to the individuals themselves. As a conscientious man Robert Montgomery ought to have been startled when edition after edition was demanded of his first production, the *Omnipresence of the Deity.* After two or three impressions had been disposed of, the plea of juvenility (for he was only nineteen when the work was written) might be presumed to be exhausted. But after half a dozen had disappeared, he might well look astonished when the publisher intimated that the public were gaping for more! 'What on earth can people see in these things of mine?' he should have exclaimed. 'Surely they cannot take me for a Milton or even a Klopstock! With all my self-assurance I can't

go as far as that! Really we live in a very unaccountable world.' But when, considering the biting criticisms his poems evoked from the leaders of opinion, from Macaulay and Wilson—from Blackwood and Fraser—the booksellers still sent him word that edition upon edition was going off, it surely became a matter of conscience with the author to decide whether he ought not to stop writing as the misguided multitude would not apparently cease buying. Tenth impression, fifteenth, twentieth, five-and-twentieth, and yet no signs of finality! Should not the bard have accepted this singular homage with many misgivings? Was it right to take a reader's money even if he were willing to pay it? Could Robert—best known to the profane by his sobriquet of 'Satan Bob'—do otherwise than say to his publisher when the last call was intimated, 'My friend, we ought really to make a stand. Are the people going mad? Is it for us to play into the hands of lunatics? Certainly not! Print no more for the next half dozen years, by which time the deluge of folly will have abated, and the dry land of common sense will probably have reappeared?' A few words, however, may serve to elucidate the mystery in some measure. It seems that Montgomery's appetite for praise was unlimited. His vanity, in fact, rendered him incredibly voracious. Dr. Blakey, the author of various treatises on Morality, and of a History of Philosophy, visited him in 1853, and reports that his gluttony in this particular, as displayed in the course of a short interview, was painful to witness. 'You and I,' said he to the guest, 'are far beyond the age. Now do quote me wherever you can, and do it largely, and in the highest terms of eulogy—mind, Robert Montgomery, preacher and poet, not James! I know I tower far above all my enemies. I have had a Satanic struggle with them, but now I am at the top of the tree. Whenever you can get a paragraph into any news-

paper or magazine, do remember and give me a lift.' If the narrator's statement is perfectly reliable, would it be easy to parallel this case of literary mendicancy, or discover a more diseased and unconscionable appetite for praise?

There is such a thing indeed as being too successful. When Brougham was advanced to the Chancellorship, his mother is said to have exclaimed, 'Then Harry is ruined.' In whatever light the good lady might regard her meteor son, it can easily be imagined that the wonderful reception accorded to Montgomery's books, and the equally inexplicable homage which was paid to him as a fashionable preacher, were more than such an imperfectly ballasted craft could safely weather. Well might his Sheffield namesake complain when he received epistles full of merciless abuse for what he never wrote, and others full of praise for what he regarded as miserable 'balderdash.' The disgust of the latter was great when congratulated upon the success of the *Omnipresence*, and specially when assured that it was his very best production! The awful *naïveté* of this criticism rendered it intolerably cutting, for if it was bad, as he conceived, to be mistaken for the author of the poem in question, it seemed incredible barbarity to sink all his genuine compositions to a still lower depth in the abyss of worthlessness.

CHAPTER XV.

GENIUS AT HOME.

SHALL we now knock at the door of a genius, and see what manner of man he is in the flesh, and by his own fireside?

The first visit paid by an enthusiastic admirer has often been the subject of amusing alarms. To venture into the presence of one of these exalted beings, and receive permission to grasp his hand, has appeared so great a privilege, that some modest people, frightened at their own audacity, have actually run away though their foot might be already on the threshold. When Hannah More and her sister were taken by Miss Reynolds to see Johnson, the worthy spinsters were in such a flutter as they approached his humble mansion that they went off into palpitations of the heart. Nor can we help smiling when we learn how the moralist in petticoats, whilst waiting for the moralist in pantaloons, took her seat in an easy chair, hoping to catch a ray of inspiration from that honoured piece of furniture, but was afterwards informed that it was one which he rarely occupied.

There stands the gifted one, however. At the first glance his personal appearance may convey a very different impression from that which his writings produce. A biographer of Justus Lipsius states that the great critic was so despicable in exterior, and so unimpressive in conversation, that foreigners who came to see

him would inquire for him without suspecting that they were in his presence, and after being informed of his identity would express their astonishment that this could really be the hero of erudition whom the devotees of learning everywhere admired, and whom kings and cardinals delighted to honour.

Lord Byron said of Miss Edgeworth that she looked as if she could scarcely write her own name, much less her numerous and vastly popular productions. Ugo Foscolo, notwithstanding his dandyish pretensions, was so uncomely that a jest upon his ugliness, as a grimly patent fact, became almost permissible; and once an acquaintance of his who affected not to recognise him at first on his entering a restaurant, afterwards apologised on the ground that he had taken him for an orang-outang. Samuel Rogers was said to be vainer of his person than he was of his poetry, his fortune, or his brilliant social position. Yet he had, as the satirist remarked,

> 'Mouth and chin would shame a knocker;
> Wrinkles that would puzzle Cocker.'

And so funereal was his look, that Lord Dudley asked him one day when he was going to set up his hearse?

Sir W. Davenant's notched and disfigured nose was the text of innumerable sarcasms. It afforded play for friend as well as foe, and not only drew out epigrams from wits, but jests even from beggars. Having one day refused to give alms to a mendicant, the latter muttered an ironical prayer that his eyes might not fail him as his proboscis had done, because, in that case, he would have nothing on which to rest his spectacles. The insignificance of the late Charles Darwin's nose nearly lost him a place in the exploring expedition of the 'Beagle,' upon which he shed such lustre. Pope might well have writhed when he found

himself described by Atterbury as the owner of a crooked mind in a crooked body (*mens curva in corpore curvo*). 'My girl-like countenance,' wrote Shelley, 'frequently brought me into contempt.' 'You are not like what I expected to see,' said Scheffer to Dickens; 'you are like a Dutch skipper.' Referring to which observation 'Boz' remarks, with charming petulance, 'that people seem to regard any departure from their preconceived notions as a personal injury, and as if you deserved to be kicked because you fail to realise their idea of what you ought to be.'

Dr. Johnson's untidy figure and uncouth ways exposed him to much ridicule, and sometimes to mortifying rebuffs. Accompanying Reynolds and his sister on one occasion to Miss Cotterell's house, in a fashionable quarter, the maid-servant laid hold of the lexicographer's coat as he was ascending the stairs, imagining him to be an intruder, and asked him very sharply what business he had there? 'I suppose you intend to rob the house?' exclaimed she. The illustrious Samuel was furious, and out of his whole dictionary (big as it was) he could not for some moments find words sufficiently apt to express his indignation. He roared like a bull, instead of treating the very natural mistake in the temper of a tolerant philosopher.

Yet intellect can ennoble the humblest face and light it up with its own phosphorescent glow. Le Kain, the great French actor, was unpardonably plain; but as he proceeded in his performances, the ladies, who commenced by muttering *qu'il est laid*, concluded by exclaiming *qu'il est beau*. How pretty and how piquantly feminine was Miss Reynolds' remark after reading the *Deserted Village*, 'Well, I shall never think Dr. Goldsmith ugly again.' When Madame de Stael grew animated in conversation, the listeners not only forgot that she

was decidedly ill-favoured, 'but,' says Croker, 'they also forgot that she was a woman.'[1]

So the visitor may be startled by some great mental discrepancies. When a man's writings might lead us to expect that he was one of the most joyous of mortals, we might find on making his personal acquaintance that melancholy had marked him as her own. Gavarni, the celebrated French artist, who did for France, in the comic line, what Leech did for England, wore so sad an appearance that it was said he looked like a mute performing at his own funeral, and upon being asked by a lady why he never laughed, replied, 'because it is my business to make others laugh.' Persons who were introduced to Thomas Hood, without any previous intimation respecting his physique, have been known to turn away from the quiet man with the calm, mournful face as if it were impossible that he could be the wild, rollicking humourist who had a jest for ever on his tongue, and who held the most mirth-compelling pen in the kingdom. A stranger, indeed, on meeting Mrs. Siddons for the first time in private, would not have been disappointed had he calculated upon finding her a tragedy queen even in a drawing-room. Such she really was, for, as Sydney Smith asserted, she used to 'stab the potatoes' at dinner, and when she uttered the words, 'Boy, bring me some porter,' the attendant was so overawed by her majestic tones that he dropped the dish he was carrying.

Schiller, in the society of his family or his friends, was a very different person from Schiller when engaged in literary work or in correspondence with his acquaintances. The contrast struck Baggesen with peculiar force. The Dane describes the great German poet as cold and morose, chilling in his intercourse with

[1] There is something ambiguous in this utterance; for in the case of the brilliant Baroness the difficulty was generally to believe she was a woman at all.

his associates, and specially so in his demeanour towards his wife. Not a single expression of affection appeared to escape his lips. In company, reports the visitor, he was absolutely nothing; for, unless exceptionally excited, he was neither witty nor entertaining, and whatever happy thoughts or brilliant fancies might stream from his pen, none seemed to flow from his tongue.

Mackenzie, the 'Man of Feeling,' whose sentimental compositions used to suggest to their weeping readers the idea of a person with a saddened face and a softened voice, was a jovial, rattling fellow, who liked good company, and could even join in savage diversions; for on coming home one day from a cock-fight, his glee was so exuberant that his wife could not help reproaching him by exclaiming, 'Oh, Harry, you put all your feelings on paper.'

That a man like Schopenhauer, the wretched pessimist, should have been anything but a pleasant inmate in a house, will be naturally imagined. He, the sourest of philosophers, through whose veins ran vinegar instead of blood, and all of whose organs seem to have been employed in secreting the gall of bitterness instead of the milk of human kindness, would have belied himself had he found ought that was good in a world where everything, in his view, was out of joint, and where no one born of woman could by possibility set matters right—not even himself. True to his doctrines in private, as well as in print, he quarrelled with his mother, and left her; he would not allow his housekeeper to speak to him, except at certain times; he crippled his landlady incurably by throwing her down-stairs, in consequence of which freak he was compelled by law to pay her an annual sum for life; and indulged himself in heartless profligacy as if licensed to sin simply because he was a philosopher.

Men, indeed, whose business it is to sketch character or to

take note of human follies are not always safe companions. No wonder that some nervous people feel as uneasy in the presence of a satirist as if they were shut up in a room with a fulminating shell, or an insecurely caged cobra capella. There is a story told of Holberg, the Danish dramatist, to the effect that a lady who was visiting at a house where he was temporarily residing, failed to utter a single word whilst he was present. He drew the conclusion that she was dumb, and some months afterwards on meeting her again, he inquired if that were not the case? He was told that the dame in question was gifted with the usual feminine fluency, but that she maintained an obstinate silence for fear of being introduced into one of his dramas. Holberg smiled: the lady was there already! 'I use dumb people,' said he, 'and she may see herself in my play of the *Barselstue* in the dumb scene of the second act.'

Many men of ability, too, are so far from displaying any peculiar brilliancy in their social intercourse that they make no attempt to shine in mixed company. For this there may be various reasons. John Keats had much satisfaction in playing a subdued part, because people fancied that they eclipsed one who was 'supposed to be a great poet.' And undoubtedly one of the most charming compliments which can be paid by an accredited genius to a fellow-creature is to send the latter away with the conviction that he is not only the equal, but, if anything, the superior of the former! What ordinary soul can withstand such delicious flattery? Will not the man be disposed to say to himself, 'When this much-praised individual and I meet on a common level, I find that I am quite as clever as he is, and if I had, therefore, given myself up to literature or art, as he has done, I suppose I should have won quite as much renown—probably a good deal more.'

To many persons, indeed, it may seem as incredible that a magnificent genius should rein-in his powers, as that an angel should hide his brightness in garments of serge or sackcloth. 'If you had my abilities,' said a famous statesman to a feeble follower, 'you would be certain to explode in a week!' There would have been nothing left of James Boswell but a few fragments, if, retaining his vanity, the talents and knowledge of his great idol could have been suddenly transferred to his fussy brain.

Conceit, in its ordinary signification—that is, the conceit which is exemplified in the form of puppyism—is a rare failing among men of profound ability. Ambition, unbounded aspiration, may be there; for these higher souls, in their struggles after perfection, feel that there is something in them far superior to all that has come out of them. 'If I am spared,' said Felix Mendelssohn to his friends, and he said it to the last, 'I may *some day* produce something great.'

But there have, certainly, been some clever people (though not ranking, perhaps, in the noblest class) who have given themselves airs, and devoured flattery as if it were the indispensable diet of Intellect, even administering it to themselves if there were not a sufficient supply from foreign sources.

Alexandre Dumas' disclosures respecting himself and his ways were so unrestrained that it was wittily said of him, 'he undressed himself in the public streets.' 'All the world knows,' writes he, 'with what careless candour I speak of myself.' He thought everything he did or said possessed such an overpowering interest for mankind, that he would have offered you an analysis of his very bile or saliva, under the conviction that the secretions of such an eminent person as himself must possess extraordinary attractions for all intelligent minds.

Referring to certain eminent literary qualities, he states, with unblushing assurance, 'These I possess in a remarkable degree.'

For daring coxcombry, however, commend us to his countryman, Alphonse Lamartine. After blowing his trumpet in various ways this gentleman hit upon the expedient of writing a work of fiction, of which he himself should be the hero! Having the brush entirely at his own disposal, and all the gay colours known at his command, he could depict himself as a model of beauty and a miracle of genius. He need not even stop short of the superhuman! Nor did he. In his *Raphael* he is generally understood to have described himself. In regard to perfection of form and face, this counterpart self is stated to have resembled an angelic portrait of the great artist from whom the name is derived; and in his later years it is hinted that the hero might have sat to Rembrandt as a type of Christ! But in regard to mind, never was there such a paragon in the flesh! For here was a magnificent monster who, if he had wielded the chisel, might have sculptured the Psyche of Canova; if he had given himself up to the 'language of tones,' he would have recorded the warblings of the wind, or the breathings of a girl in her sweetest dreams; if he had been a poet, he might have penned the daring apostrophes of Job to his Maker, or the soft moonlight talk of Romeo to his Juliet; or, if he had been born in a classical republic, he would have soared like Cæsar, declaimed like Demosthenes, or gloriously expired like Cato!

So exquisite, indeed, was the susceptibility of this intellectual Phœnix, that the author represents him as too good for earth, and says that he laboured under a rare kind of nostalgia; for instead of suffering like some home-sick mortals from the *mal-*

du-pays, *il avait le mal-du-ciel* (heaven-sickness). Such was Lamartine's negative photograph of himself.[1]

Margaret Fuller was perhaps still heartier in her appreciation of herself. Without a blush, apparently, she declared to some of her friends, 'I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable with my own.' Entertaining this view it was a pure waste of breath on her part to express, as she did, a wish that no one else should 'conceive more highly' of her than she did of herself; seeing that it was impossible to surpass her in this particular.

Gustave Doré, spite of the popularity of his early productions, believed that the public did supreme injustice to his talents by not accepting him, even whilst a lad, as the greatest painter of his times. His greed for distinction was perfectly insatiable. It was a French passion indulged in a Frenchman's style, and with all a Frenchman's antics. When he learnt what large prices were paid to other artists, 'he wanted to tear his hair with rage.' He 'nearly had convulsions one day on hearing that Meissonier had received 200,000 francs for a single picture.' 'What,' exclaimed he, 'a thing like that! Now, look at me. I *can* paint. I know I could paint better than Meissonier at any rate. Have I ever been paid 200,000 francs for anything? No, I never shall be. The fact is, that no one understands me. I shall live and die misunderstood, or never comprehended at all, which is worse.'

To revenge himself upon the public this youth (not long out of his minority at the time) resolved to indulge in what he doubtless deemed a bit of splendid spite. 'I am going to paint,' said he to M. Paul Lacroix (Bibliophile Jacob) 'a series of pictures representing the abominations of Paris, with all the old

[1] *Raphael: Pages de la Vingtième Année.* Par A. de Lamartine.

streets, all the wretches and outcasts, and many other realistic things that I have been meditating upon for some days past.' And paint these abominations he did. There were twelve pictures, 'all positively sickening in their realism,' as Lacroix remarked. 'Loathsome productions' was the criticism even of his friend Théophile Gautier; 'they reek with the filth of all that is lowest and vilest in the most abject slums of Paris.' Could vengeance well assume a more perverse and peevish form? 'Gustave Doré,' says his biographer, 'died of a broken heart; of crushed ambition and ruined hopes; of the ever corroding, ever present thought that he was not appreciated by his country.' [1]

Nor have English gluttons in the matter of praise been wholly wanting. Johnson told Mrs. Piozzi, who was well versed in arts of adulation, that if Samuel Richardson had lived till she could have added her incense to that which smoked on his altar, she would have added two or three years to the novelist's life. 'For,' said the doctor, 'that fellow died merely for want of change amongst his flatterers; he perished for want of more (of them), like a man obliged to breath the same air till it is exhausted.' There is a happy pungency in this illustration which a very little knowledge of science will enable us keenly to appreciate. From the same atmosphere continually respired, all the stimulating oxygen must speedily be withdrawn; but introduce a new supply, and the gasping patient soon recovers his tone and becomes as brisk as ever. Or, changing the figure, as the great censor could easily do with his wealth of metaphor, he observed that the author of *Pamela* could not be 'content to sail quietly down the stream of reputation without longing to taste the froth from every stroke of the oar.'

Wordsworth's sonnet on his accession to the Laureateship,

[1] *Life and Reminiscences of Gustave Doré*, by Blanche Rooseveldt, pp. 167, 499.

if really his, is superlatively rich in vanity. Apostrophising the Bays, he tells us how he places them on his head with a palpitating hand;

'Since worthier minstrel there is none beside.
There shall they bide!'

continues he,

'Till he who follows next,
Of whom I cannot even guess the name,
Shall by court favour, or some vain pretext
Of fancied merit, desecrate the same,
And think perchance he wears them quite as well
As the sole bard who sang of Peter Bell.'

Again, eccentricity is sometimes regarded as the privilege of Genius—nay, occasionally as one of its chief constituents. How such a fallacy can have arisen must be matter of surprise. For it is an obvious fact that oddity is just the one thing in the world which any simpleton can substitute for solid accomplishments. The abjectest human donkey, who wished to make himself conspicuous in a crowd, could do so by proceeding to walk about on all-fours, whereas he might be utterly unnoticed if he preserved his natural posture. By what strange infatuation is it, then, that men frequently accept certain acts as evidences or accompaniments of genius, when the smallest scrutiny would show that they were within the reach of any blockhead in creation? Misanthropy, discourtesy, profanity, ill-tempered ways, oddities of manner, peculiarities of garb—scores of improprieties, conventional or otherwise—have all been excused or admired on this ground, without reflecting apparently that it does not need a grain of sense to practise them to perfection.

Almquist the Swede, one of the most varied and prolific of writers, but, at the same time, one of the most startling and

eccentric—a man who commended suicide, advocated equivocal principles of marriage, and wrote a work to show that a harlot might be an excellent Christian in effect—betook himself at one time to the forest, where he lived in a miserable hut feeding upon porridge with a wooden spoon, and clothing himself in the homeliest apparel. But a short trial of the experiment was sufficient, and the ardent patron of the New Life was glad to return to Stockholm and civilisation.

The vagaries of Alphonse Karr carried him to the very boundary line of sanity, if indeed they did not hurry him over. At one time he lived in an apartment furnished with a mat only, on which he sat, wrote, ate, and slumbered, paying the penalty in the shape of rheumatism and neuralgia. At another time, he had the ceiling, walls, and floor of his room painted black; its ornaments were skulls, human bones, and weapons of war; and his couch was a coffin resting on trestles, where he slept dressed in state, with a pair of wax candles burning at his head. After this fit of folly was over, he had his quarters done up in Oriental style at a considerable expense, and arrayed himself as a Chinese mandarin. At one period he kept a domesticated hyæna, to the great terror of the printers' boys who dared not approach with their proofs; and at another he had in his service a prodigious Newfoundland dog, and a coal-black negro, whose business was, of course, to make a sensation whenever they appeared at his heels. Could not any half-witted person have done as much?

A French dramatic critic, Merle, who died in 1852, went to bed on one occasion without being at all unwell, and never left it for years, except for an hour each day when it was necessary to eat his dinner and have his couch trimmed. There he read and wrote, with his favourite books about him, and the manuscript plays sent for consideration before him; nor could the entreaties

of his friends, or the remonstrances of his doctors, induce him to play the part of an ordinary mortal during the whole of that period.

In another respect, men of genius have been still more open to criticism. They have been distinguished somewhat dolefully as the *irritabile genus*. Much has been said in their justification, on the ground that their organisation, mental and physical, may often be much more delicate, and therefore much more easily disordered, than that of commonplace mortals. Undoubtedly many intellects are so sensitively strung that a very little rude handling will produce a painful jangling of the strings. In other cases a dyspeptic stomach may sour a man's soul and turn his utterances into vinegar and gall. But whatever may be the cause, the result is sometimes perplexing beyond explanation. A reader of Carlyle's, who knew him only as the worshipper of heroes, the admirer of strength or valour even though it broke all the ten commandments in turn, the scorner of all that was feeble and puling either in sentiment or action, would naturally expect that he, above all persons, would have been a model of manliness, and this even in case he had been a martyr to pain. Yet, accepting the lamentable correspondence published by Mr. Froude as a clue to his character, he appears for the most part to have whimpered and groaned his way through later life, as if he were some distempered child whose body was doomed to perpetual pain, and whose mind was destined to labour under perpetual irritation. The word manliness, in fact, is the last word one would ever dream of applying to his case. If a cock crowed within earshot it almost drove him to frenzy. The sound of a piano in a neighbouring house was too much for his philosophy. When his dwelling was undergoing some repairs, it might be inferred from his printed moans that no proprietor ever suffered

so much from the process, and that the carpenters and paper-hangers were a legion of devils who visited Cheyne Row for the express purpose of tormenting him. Nay, his soul sank in craven terror before the bustle of a railway station, the horrors of which, he said, were 'a thing to remember all one's life—perhaps the liveliest emblem of Tartarus the earth affords!' That his nerves were quiveringly hung, and that his sensitiveness was deplorably acute, may be readily admitted; but what would he have said if sturdy Samuel Johnson had been seen blubbering because he was suffering from toothache, or if the great Fritz had allowed himself to lose a battle because some 'demon fowl' had disturbed his rest in the morning? We may imagine how the Sartor would have apostrophised any person who had ventured to indulge in similar infirmities, and who, sitting by the wayside of life, claimed sympathy from every passenger as if his sufferings were of a wholly unexampled description. 'Poor wretched mortal,' he would probably have said, 'cease those miserable Jeremiads of thine! Thinkest thou that we want another Book of Lamentations, especially if it is to be inspired from below? Dost thou imagine that thy petty woes will be music to mortal ears, still less to immortal? Is there not enough of weeping and wailing in this sorrowful world without a perpetual voluntary of sobs and growls from thee? Are there not big enough woes which *must* be listened to, without being bothered by thy foolish caterwauling? What if a cock does crow at an unwelcome hour? Has Nature done thee wrong in creating such fowl, and ought she to extinguish the whole breed to ensure thee unbroken rest? What if the strummings of a piano do filter through thy walls; is it like an heroic soul to stamp up and down, and tear his hair as if the music of the spheres had suddenly given place to the howlings

of Tophet, and the shriekings of the Lost? Thou canst not sleep forsooth? Well, dost thou think that the wheels of the universe should be stopped every night that thou mightest lie down to snore until it pleases thee to awake? Should all or any of the activities of the world be suspended to humour a soul full of self and a body brimful of bile? Dyspeptic, indeed? Pretty thing to find a man screeching as if there were something wrong in creation, and then to learn that the evil lies in his own fretful entrails! There is an easy remedy for this and the like! Fell trees, break stones by the roadside, or, better still, take six months' spell at the tread-mill—that blessed machine for all whose digestion is bad whether in mind or in person! 'This done, thou wilt be able to sleep soundly even in the roar of Fleet Street, or close to the very thunders of Niagara. Above all, cease to blubber at thy fate like a foolish boy bereft of his gingerbread, but rise and quit thee like a man!'

Walter Savage Landor was such a quarrelsome soul that he found it necessary, or at least advisable, to leave his native shores for a considerable period. His purchase and occupation of Llantony-Abbey in Wales constituted, as Mr. S. C. Hall relates, a dismal record of temper. 'Law-suits and libel form its staple; insult everywhere encountered insult; persecution and prosecution were met by their like. One of the most beautiful bits of South Wales became an Inferno, and both his enemies and himself rejoiced when he quitted it for ever. His Muse was his lawyer; he chastised his adversaries in Latin and in English verse. The disputes at Llantony were, as Forster calls them, a comedy with a very tragical fifth act.' That he was scurvily treated by some of his tenants, and unfavourably, if not fractiously, regarded by some of his neighbours, spite of his planting half a million trees for the public good, may be readily

believed; but we may judge what his disposition was when he stigmatised the Welsh as a reptile race; pulled down, in a huff a house which he had erected at a prodigious cost, and eagerly shook off the dust of the Principality from his feet when he abandoned it in bittter dudgeon at last. In Italy it was much the same: even under those sunny skies, and on that classic soil, his was a discontented and repining spirit, burthensome to itself and wearisome to others. At Como, at Florence, at Pisa, at Fiesole, with very few exceptions, he made misery for every one who came within reach of his influence. So intimates Mr. Hall.[1]

All this was the more remarkable because Landor was never the victim of poverty, social neglect, or perverse viscera; nor was he troubled with a rarely-sensitive mind, or an ill-compounded *physique*. On the contrary, he was a burly mortal, with boisterous spirits, and a bursting laugh which seemed, by some freak of nature, to have been incongruously associated with a querulous soul. Decidedly, however, he was one of those men to whom some persons would have said, as Dr. Cyril Jackson, Dean of Christ's Church, unhandsomely remarked to Hayley the poet, when they found themselves dwellers in the same locality, 'Mr. Hayley, I trust that you and I may always be very good friends and neighbours; that is, I trust we may see very little of each other!'

Ben Jonson's satirical tendencies could not be restrained even by considerations of self-interest, to say nothing of ordinary prudence. Not to mention his attacks upon men like Inigo Jones, who had it in their power, as they had it in their will, to damage him severely, he did not scruple to vent his sarcasms upon his acknowledged benefactors. Who does not recall his

[1] Mr. S. C. Hall's *Retrospect*, vol. ii. p. 53.

message to the first James: 'He sends me this because I live in an alley; tell him his soul lives in an alley.' His pension as Poet Laureate under Charles I., intermittently paid as it was, was nearly lost in consequence of his bitter epigrams upon the royal household. His allowance as City Chronologer being suspended until he should undertake to discharge the duties of the office, he wrote in a fume that 'the barbarous court of Alder men have withdrawn their chandlery pension for verjuice and mustard, £33, 6s. 8d.' Not without much truth might William Drummond say of him in his well-known vitriolic sketch, that 'Rare Ben' was a 'contemner and scorner of others, given rather to lose a friend than a jest.'

Coupled with this charge of irritability sometimes comes the accusation of jealousy, and indeed of positive envy. We might well suppose that the possessor of genuine genius—true in its type, pure in its aims, noble in its exercise—would be precisely the man to value the same gift in others, and to welcome it wherever he discovered it in turn. Racine, asked by his sovereign who had shed the greatest lustre on his reign, replied, pointing to his brother dramatist, 'Molière.' No sooner had Cicero heard one of the eclogues of the youthful Virgil recited than he recognised in him the new hope of the age, *magnæ spes altera Romæ.*

That there have been many painful illustrations to the contrary is, however, undeniable. The most horrible perhaps, if true (and Heaven grant that it is a falsehood), is the story that the elder Chenier consented to his brother's death on the scaffold during the Revolution, from jealousy of his abilities as a writer! We must also take, with much qualification, Jeffrey's statement respecting Thomas Campbell. 'He is one of the best fellows in the world,' wrote the great literary flagellator; 'if,

however, he has a fault, it is that he is envious, and to that degree that he wishes that the walls may fall and crush every one who may excel him.'

Miss Mitford indulges in some stinging observations upon the presumed indifference of writers to their brethren of the craft. 'I am amazed,' she remarks, 'at the utter selfishness of authors. I do not know one single poet who cares for any one's poetry but his own. In general, they read no books except such as may be necessary to their own writings; that is, to the work they may happen to be about, and even then I suspect that they only read the bits they may immediately want. Only a few like Scott and Southey are above this weak baseness.' Pity, if true!

Far more pleasant, however, is it to note, on the other hand, that some writers have been so lovable that we all regard them as personal friends. If they were guilty of any small outrage upon prudence or propriety, we feel inclined to forgive them on the spot; nay, we may possibly find ourselves indulging in a wish that they had committed a few more in order that we might enjoy the luxury of pardoning them even unto seventy times seven! Who, for instance, could have quarrelled with Charles Lamb—the gentle Elia—when he made a pun at a funeral, to the great consternation, as he said, of the mourners, and was in consequence nearly turned out of the company? Which of us does not immediately conceive a strong desire to have heard that pun? Who believes that the auditors, however much they might appear to deplore or resent the incongruity, would not feel inwardly delighted? Put him out, indeed? No such thing! Not a hand or foot would be uplifted. Depend upon it, every soul present felt considerably relieved, and went through the distressing duties of the occasion with a much lighter heart after the perpetration of that jest.

Such again is the affection we entertain for Goldsmith spite of his failings (or rather, as some will say, *because* of them, seeing that they were of such an engaging nature in general), that when we read of his pecuniary distresses at the distance of more than a century we feel tempted to draw a bank-note (if we have one) out of our pocket, and offer it to his memory. Many of us with a little money at command will probably exclaim, 'Would that we had been on the spot when the bailiff came with his writ, and when that savage landlady, broom in hand, produced her elongated score!' For who could have stood stoically by, and heard unmoved the pitiless allegation of legal duty on the tipstaff's part, and the stormy wrangle, followed by the still stormier refusal to give a day's further indulgence, on the virago's side? Should we not have needed hearts of adamant, or purses of hopeless vacuity, to resist poor Oliver's bewildered looks and despairing remonstrances?

Nor are these amiable figures rare in literary history. Take, for instance, Charles Kingsley. 'I would speak,' says his biographer, 'of his chivalry—for I can call it nothing else—in daily life; a chivalry which clothed the most ordinary and commonplace duties with freshness and pleasantness. I soon discovered that an unswerving resolution at all times, under all circumstances, to spare himself no trouble, and to sustain life at a lofty level, was the motive power of his chivalry. There was much in him of that knightly character which is heroic even to a fault, and which from time to time provokes the shafts of malice and ridicule from lesser men. That the persistent fortitude by which he gained and sustained this temper was one of the root principles of his life, was touchingly illustrated to me one day, when seeing him quit his work to busy himself in some trivial matter for me. I asked him not to trouble about it then and

there; and he, turning on me with unusual warmth, said, 'Trouble! don't talk to me of that, or you will make me angry. I never allow myself to think about it.'[1]

Robert Chambers could see no reason why a literary man might not thread his way through existence without any of those 'grievances and evil passions which others picture as inseparable from the profession.' For his own part, he believed that he had realised in his domestic circle the happiness which had been represented as wholly visionary. 'Hardly such a thing as an annoyance (said he) ever breaks the calm tenor of my life, and there is not one person with whom I was ever acquainted whom I cannot meet as a friend.'

When William Cobbett had reached the nominal span of existence, he remarked on one occasion, 'I have led the happiest life of any man I have ever known. Never did I know a single moment when I dreaded the future.' Yet here was a writer whose career had been one of a very unenviable description. He had been in perils many and disheartening. He had been indicted, fined, imprisoned. He had been compelled to fly from America to escape republican vengeance, and again compelled to fly back in order to avoid the unpleasing attentions of monarchical power. For many years he was in pecuniary difficulties; and when declared bankrupt was forced to begin the world anew with only three shillings at his command. Not a model to be imitated by any means was William Cobbett, except in such virtues as perseverance, manliness, and sundry others which he undoubtedly possessed: but if a man whose life was a long battle could turn all hostile elements to satisfactory account, and extract happiness even from adversity, does not this furnish a splendid contrast to the sickly sorrows and

[1] *Charles Kingsley: His Letters, and Memories of his Life*, vol. ii. p. 287.

petulant miseries of those who, perhaps with far easier or more hopeful fortunes, dare not look the world boldly in the face, but sit down by the wayside of existence (on a soft seat, however, if possible) to cry themselves asleep, or call upon Death to come to their relief?

But whilst in the abode of Genius curiosity will naturally inquire how does the owner deal with domestic cares? Profound thinkers cannot be expected to be dabs at household duties. A rapt poet may be excused if he looks particularly imbecile when giving instructions to his cook or washerwoman. 'It costs me less,' said Schiller, when a bachelor, 'to execute a whole conspiracy (Die Verschwörung des Fiesco) in five acts than to settle my domestic arrangements for a week. I fall headlong out of my ideal world if a stocking in holes reminds me of the real world.' Frequently an author is so absorbed in his pursuits that he has little leisure, perhaps little disposition, to attend to the training of his children or the management of his wife. 'I don't know,' said the elder Corneille, 'which is my best production, but that (pointing to his son) is certainly the worst.' It was wittily remarked of Buffon's heir that he was the worst chapter in his father's *Natural History*. It would be difficult to believe that La Fontaine could be so oblivious as to forget his own offspring, if the fact were not corroborated by many stories illustrative of his marvellous absence of mind. Meeting a young man in company one day, he spoke very highly of him after the youth retired. 'Why, that is your own son,' observed some one, with surprise. 'I am glad to hear it,' replied the gratified parent. With such a forgetful mind, was it any wonder if Madame de la Sablière spoke of him as one of her three pet *bêtes*—her dog, her cat, and her La Fontaine?' Nor was it at all astonishing that a wit should say of him, in reference to his

sprightly talk in fables and his stupid manners in society, that amongst brutes he was the most *spirituel* of men, and amongst men the greatest of brutes.

It is pleasant, on the other hand, to read such an earnest exhortation as Fichte addressed to his wife at Jena, whilst he (driven into a sort of philosophical exile) was preparing a home for her at Berlin. She had informed him that their little Hermann conducts himself like an 'ill-bred boy.' The father's heart is deeply distressed. The worst thing that could happen, he intimates, would be the spoiling of the child. He adjures her by all that is holy to make him her first and her last care. Firmness and coolness are the qualities required in discipline. Let the boy know that a resolution once expressed is irrevocable, and that neither petulance nor entreaty will alter it in the least. Yield but once, and it will cost unspeakable labour to set the little desperado right. 'Don't imagine, he adds, 'that children can be governed by reason or persuasion. They cannot think for themselves; all that can be done for them during the early stages of life is to teach them obedience and enforce submission to superior minds.'

Nor whilst under the roof of Genius will it be surprising if the visitor feels some curiosity as to the owner's diet.

What an author eats and drinks indeed is not wholly a personal question. The amount of digestive power he possesses is of some consequence to literature, and when he sits down to write he ought, if a conscientious person, to inquire whether his stomach is in a happy or discontented mood. Thackeray told Mr. Fields that if he had been dining late, and did not feel in a remarkably good humour next morning, 'he was inclined to make his characters villainously wicked, but if he rose serene, with an unclouded brain, there was no end to the lovely actions

he was willing to make his men and women perform!' Does any one doubt that if the viscera of one Alexander Pope had been taken out of him, and replaced by a vigorous energetic set of intestines, the little wasp of Twickenham, who was ever ready to whip out his sting, and puncture even his best friends, would have been changed into something like a honey-producing bee, drawing sweets from every flower, and hiving them for public use? And would it not be a point of the first moment in the Republic of Letters if every critic before sitting down to his desk would institute an honourable inquiry into the state of his interior, and make some sort of estimate of the quantity of indigestible material he had thrown into that much enduring cavity, so as to satisfy himself that he was not likely to indulge in any unreasonable amount of ferocity?

Some scientists assure us that animal food ought not to form a prominent item in the diet of literary men. It is apt to engender too much muscle. It may be good for a grenadier or a prize-fighter, but a poet or a scholar is not expected to be a person of large sinew or superabundant flesh. It is for him to cultivate a fragile form, a pallid hue, and an ethereal face. Possibly a touch of consumption in his looks, or a suggestion of early doom in his melancholy glance, may contribute materially to the attention he excites, and lead people to say, as Childe Harold hoped would be said of him, 'Poor Byron, how interesting he looks!' At any rate, it is clear that a thought-builder must not be specially carnivorous. No high civilisation, it seems, is compatible with heavy fare of this description. It is not by feeding on such that any one can hope to attain distinction amongst the learned. 'We can scarcely imagine a philosopher,' says an intelligent writer, 'living on horse flesh like a Tartar, or on buffalo meat like a Red Indian; and it is a fact that these

tribes appear incapable of civilisation until they acquire the habit of using less stimulating diet, and begin to cultivate the fruits of the earth to their own use.'[1] A sedate thinker, therefore, should always lean to the farinaceous. Bacon, the sage, might never have become a leader in philosophy had he subsisted mainly on bacon the animal. Newton could scarcely have composed his *Principia* had he dined constantly on venison or roast beef. Nor could Cowper perhaps have written his *Task* had he fed freely on the hares he was accustomed to fondle. There are few, however, whose views have been as temperate as those of Ariosto, for he used to say that if there ever was a time when people really lived on acorns, he was just the person for such a period.

There have indeed been a few ethereal souls to whom it was of small consequence whether their bodies were properly victualled or scandalously neglected. So superior was Shelley to the drudgeries of digestion, that he would sometimes ask his wife, 'Mary, have I dined?' We are all familiar with the pleasant story of Stukeley's raid upon Newton's chicken, which the visitor devoured whilst the great astronomer was busy with his starry inquiries. 'I thought,' said the sage, when he sat down to his meal and found nothing but well-picked bones upon the dish, 'that I had not dined, but I find I am mistaken' —Stukeley listening all the time with an infamous chuckle!

On the contrary, Dr. Johnson was the man for a leg of mutton. He distinguished himself when a boy at his Aunt Ford's by the splendid execution he did upon one of these joints; insomuch that his mother assured him, with great concern, that the exploit would hardly ever be forgotten. Throughout life, however, he maintained his predilection for a leg of mutton.

[1] Dr. G. Moore's *Use of the Body in reference to the Mind*, p. 306.

But the illustrious Samuel was notorious for his rude and savage manners. Lord Chesterfield, indeed, styled him a 'respectable Hottentot.' When he dined, whether it was in his early days at Cave's behind a screen, or in his later ones at Sir Joshua's hospitable board, he fed like the lions at the Tower or Exeter Change. Might not his pugnacious temper, and his uncouth demeanour, have something to do with his animal diet? But he could be as mild as a lamb. That also we can explain. What was his favourite beverage no reader need be told. The homage which the sage did to the Celestial Empire, by emptying cup after cup of tea until his fair entertainers were weary with the service, and almost paralysed with wonder at his capacity, has become memorable in literary history. That he should have loved the gentle plant as he did, may seem to be somewhat inconsistent with his carnivorous propensities, but is it not the plant which favours talk, and which would help him to pour out his wonderful discourse with the greater prodigality? Whenever Ursa Major sat down to table, if the fare were at all attractive, he bore in mind the Scriptural precept, 'Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.' On one occasion, being treated to honey and clotted cream, he went to work so vigorously—voraciously is the better word—that his host became alarmed for his safety, and doubtless marvelled whether his digestion could be equal to the disposal of such a cloying mass.

It is scarcely to be expected that deep thinkers will suffer much from corpulence. The *mens divinior* has a natural objection to take up its quarters in a huge mass of flesh. We have all laughed at Gibbon when he went on his knees before Mdlle Cuchod to offer his hand and heart, and found on his rejection that he could not rise without assistance. It might be fine fun for the mirthful lady to watch the abortive struggles of her

suitor, but who can describe the chagrin of the great historian when he realised his own decline and fall both in the flesh and the spirit? In his latter days that lively Frenchman, Jules Janin, became immensely stout. He lost the power of self-movement, and was carried by his attendants from place to place. This supremacy of fat troubled him much, and on one occasion he said pathetically to some friends, 'I suppose I am celebrated. I am a great writer. I am a member of the Academy. *Eh bien!* I would renounce all that glory to walk round this room without assistance.' Doubtless it was much the same with Henry Fielding when the dropsy rendered him utterly unwieldy.

But it is a delicate duty to pass from the solids which a genius should eat to the liquors he should drink. It is of course impossible to advert to this topic without remembering that intemperance has found its most brilliant victims in the ranks of the gifted. What a long list of the Fallen might be compiled! Certainly one of the most mournful of spectacles is that of Genius in the gutter! Who does not recall the case of poor Hartley Coleridge, an intellectual peer by descent, as well as one of Nature's notables by individual endowment? When met, as he often was, staggering along the highway, muttering maudlin nonsense with lips almost as eloquent as his great father's; or when found lying in a ditch, his clothes saturated with filth, and his countenance smeared with slime, who would not have wept to see a lofty intellect discrowned and disgraced:—'Reason's mintage charactered in the face unmoulded,' and its possessor reduced to the 'inglorious likeness of a beast'?

Certainly, if self-reproach, if repentance without amendment, could atone for these delinquencies, the Recording Angel, after penning a few pages of his diary, would have written 'recommended to mercy.' Good resolutions indeed are rarely wanting

on such occasions, but rarely are such resolutions observed. Desperate efforts were made in poor Hartley's case, and every now and then the enslaver was solemnly dismissed, but again and again the banished one returned with spirits more potent for evil than itself. For days the overmastered man would withdraw from his home without giving the slightest hint of his purpose, and then glide in again with his pockets emptied, his clothes all tattered, and his appearance so dishevelled, that he seemed to have been going through a course of gratuitous beggary and degradation.

John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet, was a slave to liquor. The son of a wool-sorter at Bingley, he soon exhibited a considerable amount of poetic talent, and, as he grew up, the rustics who listened to his verses began to regard him as a prodigy of Intellect. Having published a volume of poems in honour of his native dale, he went to and fro in search of subscribers, and being drawn into ale-houses, where a poet in the flesh was a rare visitor, it was no unusual thing for him to return home, his head filled with flattery, his brain besotted with beer, and his pockets drained of all the cash he had collected. A pleasant life that man's might have been had he possessed the meagrest allowance of prudence and self-restraint. Wandering amidst the picturesque scenery of the neighbourhood, and communing with nature, as all genuine poets love to do, it was in his power to have lived nobly, and to have died respected and affectionately remembered. But a deadly thirst, not for fame, but for liquor, was upon him. The genius must needs become a swine. He could not save himself—perhaps he did not try except upon paper—from

'Those flaming draughts which bring the surest death.'

Sinning and repenting, the poor Airedale bard dragged

through the mire of Intemperance the gift which God had bestowed, until he yielded it up soiled and dishonoured on the banks of the stream he loved so dearly, and in which he caught a mortal chill whilst staggering home one night beneath the moon's reproving light. 'What malady,' exclaimed Poe, in one of his remorseful moments, 'is comparable to alcohol?'

Nothing human will ever make the world sober, but suppose it were the practice to treat all who die of drink as self-murderers, and have them interred in dark companionship in some gloomy nettle-grown nook of the churchyard? Not that this arrangement would have many terrors for ordinary topers, but surely those whose life has been animated by the love of Fame, and who have often gazed at the starry sphere with longing, aspiring eyes, might look with dread upon a fate which consigned their relics to the suicide's recess in the burial-ground, instead of entitling them to a home in Poets' Corner.

There is one case of intoxication, however, upon which many will be disposed to look with considerable indulgence. Let us imagine their view of the transaction. 'It may be very wicked,' they will admit, 'to recall Wordsworth's single departure from the path of sobriety. But the occasion was so deliciously appropriate that we find it impossible to refrain from a chuckle, it may be a scandalous chuckle, of delight. Met in Milton's own room at Cambridge, drinking in honour of his glorious memory, dilating enthusiastically upon the productions of the immortal bard, is it any wonder if the little company, pouring out one libation after another, found it as difficult to discern the boundary which separates temperance from over-indulgence, as voyagers do to distinguish the line which divides the Northern from the Southern Hemisphere? Where is the moralist, with a spark of poetry in his soul, who could have denounced the young

devotee, had he known that this would have been his sole iniquity in the way of liquor? What magistrate could have found in his heart to fine the culprit five shillings and costs; or, if so, should we not say that he ought himself to have been mulcted in five pounds with a month at the mill? No doubt it was very wrong. As a point of law, Wordsworth ought to have kept sober even on this seductive occasion. 'But think how he might naturally reason! After a single bumper he would probably say to himself, "My reverence for John Milton must not end here: it cannot surely be exhausted in a single glass. I must take another in all fairness to his memory!" This finished, it would of course become a question for him, as an honourable man, whether he had done full justice to the greatest of our epic bards. "Nobody ever wrote like that blind seer of the Barbican," he would continue, "and here am I pulling up at the second bumper. This will never do! We are engaged in a solemn festivity, and must conduct ourselves like men of mettle. The least we can do is to offer up another libation to our poetical idol." So we might follow the course of his argument, pursued, as it would be without doubt, until day dawned and it became necessary to attend College Chapel, where, it must be admitted, his devotions would not be improved by the unclean homage he had just paid to the *manes* of Milton. But remember it was only once, and that once in a chamber, and at a banquet, and under conditions which might have tempted all the teetotal poets in the world to break their pledge.' So the palliators of this solitary outbreak would undoubtedly contend.

Hobbes told Aubrey that he had been drunk in his life a hundred times, which, writes the recorder coolly, taking his great age into account, 'did not amount to much above once a year.' Neither party seems to have considered that this was exactly

one hundred times more than was consistent with the Law and the Prophets.

Sir Richard Steele's little notes to his wife, when detained on business (or what he wished her to consider as such), are well-remembered incidents in his life. The most expressive of them perhaps is the one which runs thus: 'Dear Prue,—Sober, or not sober, I am ever yours, RICHARD STEELE, Feb. 16, 1716.' Now imagine the poor subjugated man finding it necessary to write to his exacting spouse, but feeling at the same time conscious of his unseemly condition. He suspects that she will discover his state from the staggering character of his handwriting, to say nothing of his manifold lapses from sobriety on previous occasions. Half intoxicated, however, as he is, a sudden flash of wit suggests to him that he may probably turn his iniquity to brilliant account. Knowing much of the female heart, and comprehending its enormous craving for affection, if not for admiration, the rogue mutters to himself—so at least we may suppose—'I will give her to understand that my love for her is so profound that it cannot be drowned by any amount of liquor! She shall learn that at no stage of drunkenness can I lose my respect for such an admirable woman! Even if I should be laid under the table it will be found that I am hers as devotedly as that condition of things will permit. What woman can fail to be pleased with a man's constancy even in his cups? What is the state in which husbands are most fickle, and apt to be most insubordinate? Undoubtedly when they are half-seas over! It is just then that they feel inclined to break out into rebellion, and snap their fingers at their angry spouses. But can my lady fail to accept it as a compliment, if I intimate that even when the wit is out, the wine being in, what is left of me is entirely at her disposal? She must be gratified to learn that I am wholly hers

even when my mind is almost bereft of intelligence, and when my vile body would find considerable difficulty in holding itself erect.' And so the arch-sinner flatters himself that this brief epistle will prove a splendid stroke of diplomacy, and, at the same time, impart an ingenious sanction to his carousal for the night. Charles Lamb would probably have called this a delicious bit of wickedness, and with his 'insuperable proclivity to gin,' as Carlyle unamiably remarks, would probably have wished to share in Steele's little revel.

But passing by these equivocal episodes, let us follow the child of Genius into the doleful path which so many have to traverse.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE VIA DOLOROSA.

'THE way to Fame,' says Sterne, 'is like the way to Heaven —through much tribulation.' The opening chapters in the aspirant's career are, as we have seen, frequently full of trouble and disappointment. He must often matriculate in misery. Obstacles are flung before him with a prodigality which threatens to debar his approach to the glittering goal. There are few tales more exciting than those of struggling, but indomitable genius. You cannot fail to

> 'Mark what ills the scholar's life assail;
> Toil, poverty, the patron, and the gaol.'

You see him attacked by a troop of difficulties, which close upon him as if resolved that he shall be completely crushed. Yet, in many cases, you also see him bearing up heroically against those adversaries without bating one jot of heart and hope. The discipline is rough, for Fame handles her chosen children rudely at times; but if they can endure this rugged schooling patiently, there is no doubt it constitutes one of the best stimulants to activity, and contributes richly to their mental development. They are dealt with, as a colonel in the Peninsular war is said to have treated his regiment: he allowed it to be surrounded by the enemy, and then coolly told his men that they must either be 'extinguished or distinguished.' The literary biography of Germany in

particular, the lives of such men as Richter, Fichte, Schiller, Voss, and others, are replete with illustrations of this description.

As he advances in life, the gifted one finds that he must not only prepare to endure the ordinary sorrows of humanity, but must probably encounter others which are more special to his profession. If it be true, as Sainte-Beuve remarks, that *la douleur est plus adaptée à notre nature que le plaisir*, we may assume that this principle will apply more pointedly to minds of a higher organisation than to those of humbler perceptions and duller emotions. 'Of all the faculties born with me,' writes Corinne, 'that of sorrow is the only one I have exercised to the full.'

In many ways genius must suffer for the proud prerogative it enjoys. Could all its penalties be anticipated and thoroughly comprehended, there are certainly some who would shrink from the acceptance of the gift, for Nature tells us frankly that it is a crown of thorns as well as of glory. But as there are thousands of people who would accept a diadem, even if it were spiked within and without, or seat themselves on a throne, even if it were studded with nails like the cask in which Regulus was imprisoned, so the longing for fame, when eagerly indulged, will generally overpower every other feeling, and lead a man to brave every possible peril.

Of the many miseries to which genius is peculiarly exposed, only a few can be mentioned here; and upon these few it will be a duty to touch with a rapid hand. Illustrations abound, for some have had a very surfeit of sorrow.

First, let it be remembered that the fine endowment, which has been the subject of so much envy and admiration, seems often to enfeeble, sometimes to shatter, the frail vessel in which it is lodged. A fragile frame, delicate nerves, excessive sensibility, and trembling health, are frequent attendants upon lofty

endowments. It would seem, in many cases, as if the celestial guest required a finer bodily tissue than the clay which suffices for ordinary use.

The agonies which were endured by poor Cowper are well known, and are all the more remarkable from the fact that the man who was temporarily driven to madness by the prospect of undergoing a mere examination for a clerkship, was really one of the most vigorous and masculine of poets. The author of the ever-stirring ballad of *John Gilpin* was at times the saddest soul in all England. 'That,' said his friend Newton on one occasion, 'is the first smile for sixteen months!'

Pascal was another specimen of suffering, consequent upon physical weakness and morbid emotion; his powerful intellect was almost palsied by an accident which happened to him in his carriage; and the writer, who may be said to have amused all Europe by his laughing artillery, and alarmed all Popedom by his matchless irony, sank at an early age into a gloomy recluse.

Leopardi, the Italian poet, suffered from the softening and distortion of his bones; the organs in his chest being so compressed that his breathing was difficult and his circulation impeded; consumption and dropsy supervened, and for twenty years the brave man who aspired to become immortal by his labours, knew little, if any, respite from his sufferings.

Heinrich Heine for a large portion of his life was a prey to tortured nerves, and, like the Gymnotus, his body seemed to be made up of batteries of pain, which, however, were always discharged into himself. 'He slept,' says Lewald, 'many times at my house, and not only the clock in his sleeping-room had to be removed, but also the one in the next room had to be totally brought to a stand-still. The tick-tack and the striking of the hours would otherwise have so strangely affected him, that, as he

assured me, he would have the worst of headaches. In Paris he was always a long time in making his selection of a dwelling which should satisfy him in this respect (quiet and silence). The loneliest, the most remote, streets are those he prefers, and sometimes he chooses a solitary silent court, and sometimes the third or fourth from the street, far from the rush and hurry of life. No stable, no laundry, no noisy artisan must have a place near him.'

But the time came when, smitten by paralysis, he had to spend his days, not only in one dwelling, but in one bed. In a back room in the Rue d'Amsterdam, three stories high, reached by a steep staircase, and with windows looking into a dull court where the sun only shone at midday, the caustic German lay for twelve years, suffering from a malady (softening of the spinal marrow) which kept him in perpetual torture. He could not stand upright. He had to be lifted like a child from his bed when change was necessary. The sight of one eye was gone, and to see with the other it became needful to lift the unnerved lid with his finger. As the weary years went by, his infirmities increased. His back became twisted, and his body began to waste away: he lost the use of his hands and arms to such a degree that he ceased to write his letters himself more than six years before his death. His powers of mastication were so crippled that he had to be fed 'like a bird.' What he ate tasted like earth. His nervous system was so shaken that he lived in constant fear of fire, feeling how helpless he would be in case such a calamity occurred. He said jestingly that if his nerves could be exhibited in the *Exposition Universelle* (at Paris in 1855) they would obtain a gold medal for pain and suffering. 'I have endured,' said he on one occasion, 'more sorrow in the last three months than the church Inquisition ever invented.'[1]

[1] *Life of Heinrich Heine*, by Stigand, vol. ii. pp. 353, 385.

Dr. Johnson's later life was one long disease. He was scarcely a day without pain. He declared that he would at any time sacrifice a leg if he could only recover his spirits. He summed up his biography in two words—'radically wretched.' Richard Baxter, the author of the *Saints' Rest*, certainly ate much of the bread of affliction, for he said that he had tried thirty-six doctors and suffered from a still greater number of diseases. Even that little cantankerous creature, William Gifford, whose heart was of the smallest, and whose gall-bladder was of the largest, may be regarded with some degree of commiseration when we learn that he never remembered 'having had a day of real joyous health.'

Hannah More was rarely free from illness of some description. She tells us that from first to last she had laboured under more than twenty disorders. The Evil One, indeed, seemed to have been permitted to let loose some of his most harrassing retainers on purpose to paralyse a writer who, however forgotten in our day, was a prodigious power for good in her own. Yet, spite of the battery of pain which was ever pointed at this brave woman, she toiled on with tongue and pen, with head and heart, never resting in the cause of virtue, but pouring out volume after volume, until her works, it is said, were translated into every European language, and even served up in some of the Asiatic tongues.

To a more modern sister of the pen, however, illness came as a positive blessing: incredible as it may seem, Harriet Martineau fell in love with sickness, and welcomed it as the happiest condition of life. 'I never once felt the slightest or most transient desire to be well,' she declares. 'The divine repose of life in two rooms (especially with a fine sea-view), the simplification of duty to one rather prone to be tender-conscienced, and the perpetual feast of the heart administered by the kindness of

friends, are good things in the midst of which bodily troubles are lost and forgotten on review, if not from moment to moment.' Reading these words without knowing from whom they came, we might be disposed to suspect that they were the utterance of a languid, lazy soul, which preferred life in bed to life in the bustling arena of duty; but the authoress of twenty-four tales in illustration of Political Economy, and of more than fifty independent publications, was one of the last persons in the world against whom such an accusation could be justly brought. What solution can we assign? Her pains must surely have been of the mildest description since they seemed to have produced a pleasing flutter in her nerves instead of a racking agony such as Heine endured. Could she have stood for an hour, we wonder, in 'Little Ease,' or have borne with lofty languor half-a-dozen wrenches of the rack, or even a slight hug of the 'Scavenger's Daughter'?

Again, amongst physical evils blindness may be regarded as one of the greatest of calamities. Yet even blindness has been unable to arrest the workings of genius, or to seal up the soul in the 'dark inter-lunar cave' of indolence or despair. Resolute men then learn to see by deputy.

The most conspicuous case in our literary history is that of John Milton. When the crystal inlets became dark and impervious, the illustrious sufferer undertook the composition of three works—an Epic, a History of England, and a Dictionary of the Latin Tongue. For the first it is possible to suppose that no fresh stores of information would be required, and the Muses might visit the blind bard just as freely as the open-eyed singer; but to write a history without the power of ransacking records or a lexicon without the opportunity of consulting books and collating words, was to challenge difficulty, and almost compel defeat.

'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied, I fondly (foolishly) asked?' But if the question was hastily put, it was heroically answered. Out of the darkness came forth a light which may burn as long as many stars in the firmament, for the epic poem in question proved to be the immortal *Paradise Lost.* Nay, when viewing his great calamity as a providential infliction, the bard could talk in a vein of pious gaiety of 'bidding his eyes to keep holiday' for the rest of his life.

Neander, the church historian, nearly lost the power of vision without any intelligible cause, and found it thenceforth necessary to study in a great measure with other people's eyes, and to write with other people's hands. Augustin Thierry, after suffering much from feeble sight, became blind in his thirty-first year; but though the golden gates of knowledge were thus sternly closed, he did not relinquish his studies, but produced a volume of *Letters on the History of France* in the very next year. Lemercier, the dramatist, author of *Pinto*, *Agamemnon*, and other works—a bold writer who dared to beard Buonaparte on many occasions—was partially paralysed from childhood. In the days of his fame, whilst engaged in reading a manuscript comedy to the members of the French Academy, he suddenly paused: 'Gentlemen,' said he, to their horror, 'I am struck blind and cannot proceed.' Such was the fact. In a single moment he had lost his powers of vision completely. Some time afterwards he was taken to the Academy, where one of his friends was to read a paper on Pascal, which Lemercier had dictated. When the reading was finished, the company, charmed with the composition, eagerly offered him their congratulations. The author sat motionless in his chair; he had just been smitten with total paralysis!

To few men has blindness been a more awful privation than

it was to Galileo. Some three or four years before his death he lost his power of sight entirely. But what a sight that had been! It must be remembered that it was he who largely opened the starry universe to mortal gaze. It was he who pushed back the boundaries of space as man had never done before. When he made his famous discovery of the satellites of Jupiter he led the way into regions which mortal vision had never traversed, and became the herald of suns and systems and galaxies innumerable. On hearing of his calamity his friend Castelli exclaimed, 'The noblest eye which Nature ever made is darkened, an eye so privileged and gifted with such rare qualities that it may with truth be said to have seen more than all of those who are gone, and to have opened the eyes of all who are to come.' Resigning himself, as he did, to the visitation—for 'if it so pleased God it should also please him'—he could not but quail under the thought that one who had been the means of expanding the human horizon far beyond the hope or belief of all former ages, must thenceforth find himself 'shrunken into the narrow space' which his body alone could occupy. That man had a right, we may say, if any ever had, to enjoy all the privileges of vision to the last, and to feel that the Universe was open pasture for him above all other contemporary mortals.

Euler, the marvellous geometer, who solved in three days the famous problem for which his brother mathematicians asked several months, suffered 'total eclipse' when he had nearly attained the age of sixty. He lost the sight of the left eye some thirty years before whilst grappling with that formidable poser, but had not scrupled to inflict double duty upon the surviving organ until it broke down under its merciless tasks. The amount of work which that man had already undergone, and the quantity of original and ingenious matter he had published, is

probably without parallel in the annals of scientific research. For the Academy of St. Petersburg alone he engaged to supply as many Memoirs as would occupy its 'Acts' for twenty years after his decease. But when the curtain fell upon his vision he might surely consider himself absolved from further exertion? Quite otherwise! For some seventeen years he continued to live and work. As if the calamity had given additional zest to labour, he proceeded to dictate paper after paper to his attendants, one of whom was a tailor's apprentice, who did not possess the smallest mathematical knowledge; and at his death the noble toiler had not only forwarded seventy Memoirs to the Academy, independently of his other productions meanwhile, but left 250 more for revision by a friend.

Still more to be dreaded, however, than the physical ills of life, of which blindness is but one illustration, are its mental calamities. One dread presence which the gifted have often to encounter, and, alas! to endure, is incurable melancholy. Not the 'divinest melancholy' of whom Milton speaks:—

> 'The Goddess sage and holy
> Whose saintly visage is too bright
> To hit the sense of human sight,

but the sister of the 'abhorred fiend' of madness.

For a mind ever dwelling in the Debatable Land between reason and lunacy we might point to Ernst Theodor Hoffman. In that dreary region, peopled with all manner of goblins and fantastic forms, and trodden with timorous foot and bated breath by the most adventurous of wanderers, the author of the *Devil's Elixir* seemed to live, not exactly as a willing denizen, but as a captive, bound by a spell which he was unable to break. Go where he would, he was accompanied by a troop of sprites and

phantoms, and the whole world appeared to swarm with wild shapes of his own creation. Shall we say that he lived under a perpetual day-mare? It looks very like it. His consciousness of the Supernatural was not of something remote or occasional —a visit, say, from a ghost once or twice in a lifetime under justifying circumstances, and with some special or excusable mission to accomplish. But the invisible world was as accessible to his imagination as the animalcular world is to the master of a microscope; all he had to do was to place his enchanted lens to the eye, and straightway the grotesque tenantry of that world loomed into view, and became almost as palpable as the flesh and blood occupants of his own house. His brain was a haunted one. No wonder it poured out such wonderful tales of diablerie. Mentally it swarmed with phantoms, as did Bookseller Nicolai's with spectres physiologically produced.[1] He relates how in his youth, having won a considerable sum of money at a gaming establishment, he was seized with a sudden horror whilst gazing at the gold as it lay on his table. He regarded it as the earnest and evidence of a compact made with the Prince of Darkness. His soul, he thought, was to be the price. The sweat of agony began to gather on his brow. He fell, as it were, into a fathomless abyss. The torture he suffered was so great that he vowed he would never play again, and to that vow he adhered for the rest of his life. Hoffman, like Luther, would have had no difficulty in conjuring up the Evil One, but once evoked, he would scarcely have dared to pelt him with the ink-stand like the dauntless monk who feared neither man nor fiend.

For morbid melancholy and diseased sentimentality, however,

[1] 'Er beständig geheime Schrecknisse ahnte und Gespenster sah: fast zum fixen Gedanken wurde ihm der Glaube an "die tiefe Ironie die die Natur in alles menschliche Treiben gelegt,"—die Ueberzeugung dass der Teufel auf alles seinen Schwanz lege.' —*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 12th Band, p. 581.

Heinrich von Kleist stands almost unsurpassed. He whom Zschokke regarded as one of the representative poets of modern Germany, and whom Wieland praised as a dramatist combining the qualifications of an Æschylus, a Sophocles, and a Shakespeare, seemed to labour under a perpetual incubus. The mere burden of existence was too much for him, and he bent under the load of life's mysteries as a man might do under the column of air 40 miles high, which every one carries, if its lateral supports were suddenly removed. Whatever pleasure he felt in the composition of his works, these were sooner or later regarded by him with disgust. *Robert Guiscard*, his first tragedy, which drew high encomiums from Wieland, was, as we have seen, committed by its parent's hands to the flames. Another drama, *Peter the Hermit*, and a third, *Leopold of Austria*, both of which won much applause, were consigned to the same unnatural fate. The political misfortunes of his country likewise pressed upon him with such overwhelming force, that for hours together he would sit in a state of patriotic stupor.

His philosophical sorrows appear to have been still greater. The perusal of Kant would not deprive a Briton of an hour's repose—it might, indeed, contribute largely to his slumbers; but the effect upon Kleist's spirits seems to have been positively shattering. His initiation into the mysteries of that philosophy cost him his peace of mind altogether. For after he was informed that it was impossible to discover truth in itself, but only to perceive appearances which must infallibly melt away at death, his interest in life vanished. During this period he says he never opened a single book. For hours together he either tramped up and down his chamber, doing nothing, or stood at the window staring into vacancy. He sought distraction at theatres and concerts, at cafés and in smoking-rooms. To shake off the

hideous phantom of despair which now settled upon him, like the old man of the sea, he purposely committed various acts of folly, but in spite of all, he tells us that the unclean spirit of pyrrhonism returned to him with merciless pertinacity, and would not be exorcised either by mental resolves or by persistent dissipation. At one period, he determined to withdraw himself from his friends, and accordingly disappeared. He was given up for dead until one dark night a traveller in rags knocked at the door of a military acquaintance at Potsdam, and announced himself as the resuscitated Kleist, who had been working for some time as a cobbler at Coblenz. For six months he was imprisoned by the French in the Château de Joux, and it is almost with a feeling of relief that we find the poet had this one solid grievance of which to complain, whilst probably his best friends could not suppress a hope that his incarceration would do him good. But nothing can cure the incurable. Kleist's suicidal death was in ghastly keeping with his suicidal life. His Platonic acquaintance, Henrietta Vogel, exacted a promise from him that he would render her whatever service she required, and upon his assenting demanded that he should assist her in terminating her existence. Which of the two was the maddest it might be difficult to judge; but the poet considered himself bound in all courtesy to obey: worse still, he appeared to regard it as a duty to give the lady his arm on leaving this world, and to see her fairly into another. Under his escort she should pass the grim gates, and make her *debût* in the Land of Shadows. Accordingly, taking a coach from Berlin, they proceeded to a picturesque spot in the neighbourhood of Potsdam, where, after indulging in a little valedictory repast, the wretched Kleist shot his companion, and then did similar execution upon himself.

Gentlemen of the Jury, what verdict do you give? Shall it

be the voice of Mercy speaking through your lips and proclaiming this man irresponsible because insane? For it is the same person who declared that one great and god-like command was inscribed in letters of fire on the heart of every mortal—namely, 'Do thy work, fulfil thy duty.' 'If,' said he, 'I knew that there was no future for me, I would still toil with energy because that is my duty.' Had Kleist but acted upon his own noble doctrine he would not have lived the life of a sceptic, nor died the death of a driveller.

There can be little doubt that Shelley suffered to some extent from a morbid tone of mind. No surer indication of a distempered tendency can be given than the acceptance of fancies as solid facts; for when the mind loses its power of distinguishing between the imaginary and the real, be it upon a single point only, the reason is so far disabled, and insanity has so far commenced. A lunatic is generally an individual who has converted one or more fixed ideas into actualities, in which he believes as firmly as he does in the limbs upon his body or the ground beneath his feet. He deals with delusions as facts, or with facts as delusions. Now Shelley's imagination was so violent and overpowering—fainter words would be utterly inapplicable—that, according to Mr. Hogg, 'he was incapable of rendering an account of any transaction whatever, according to the strict and precise truth,' not because he loved to indulge in falsehood, 'which he cordially detested,' but because his fantasies assumed so despotic a form that he became their unresisting prey. The celebrated story of the night attack in Wales, with the firing of pistols, the struggle between the poet and the assassin, the assembling of the family in the parlour, the return of the mysterious villain, the resumption of hostilities, and the scuffle for the sword, is supposed to have been a pure invention.

of the brain ; for those who investigated the matter on the spot, according to Mr. Hogg, 'were unanimous in the opinion that no such attack was ever made.' It was an encounter which did not appear to possess even the scanty substratum of fact which usually served, when ingeniously expanded and perverted, to support the marvellous adventures of the Knight of the Rueful Countenance.. 'Had he written,' says the same narrator, 'to ten different individuals the history of the same proceeding, in which he was himself a party and an eye-witness, each of his ten reports would have varied from the rest in essential and important circumstances. The relation given on the morrow would be unlike that of to-day, as the latter would contradict the tale of yesterday.'

The Russian Gogol, one of the most striking writers Muscovy has produced, suffered from a gloomy tendency of mind, which at last grew into incurable melancholy. Even in his youth he conceived the idea that he was a doomed creature, unless he could win the favour of Heaven by leading a self-sacrificial life, and practising all manner of austerities. He had frequent fits of despair. On his father's death he was strongly tempted to put an end to his own existence. He did not scruple to anathematise his mother (much as he loved her) as a grievous sinner, and to denounce her Christianity as a thing of rites and tapers and interminable prostrations. In his last illness he declined to take any medicine, and could scarcely be induced to accept any nourishment, contending that if it was God's purpose he should live, the Divine One would see to his preservation. His death, at the age of 42, was attributed entirely to his fastings and the protracted war he had waged with the Flesh. Like many other enthusiastic ascetics he took it for granted that he was pommelling the devil when he was simply macerating and maltreating his own body.

Yet this poor sufferer, like our Cowper, was a writer of eminent comic power. In order to divert his melancholy he would sometimes conjure up the most ridiculous scenes, and crowd them with the most extravagant persons and events his fancy could suggest. It is related that once when the publisher of the *Evenings in a Farm House near Dikanka* went to the printing office where the work was in progress, he found the compositors almost dying with laughter, and on seeing him they began to cover their mouths with their hands in order to conceal their merriment. The book was Gogol's.

Perhaps, however, the Dark Spirit may have fastened upon some member of the thinker's household to taunt him with its hateful presence?

For many years Southey had a skeleton in his dwelling, the sight of which must have been unspeakably painful. To one who loved his own fireside, who rarely sought company abroad, and who detested all 'gatherings of men even for intellectual purposes,' what greater calamity could happen than the loss of reason on the part of her whom he had 'never known to do an unkind act, or say an unkind word'? After this sad event the pair continued under the same roof, they sat at the same hearth, they took their meals at the same table, they associated with each other to the last; but, said he, there was a 'living death constantly before him in the form of his Edith.' The staff on which he leaned had been irreparably broken. His affection for her remained unabated; but it was for the flower after it had faded, for the summer landscape when sheeted in winter snow, or for the joys of youth when the frosts of age have curdled and congealed the blood.

Still more terrible, perhaps, was Charles Lamb's domestic skeleton. There was insanity in the family blood. His sister,

as is well known, plunged a knife into her mother in one of her frenzied moods. Thenceforth the shadow of that most awful tragedy lay upon both their lives. But it did not abate their affection for each other, and surely that affection was as true and touching as any the world has ever witnessed. When the Dark Presence was not visible, the tender deference which each displayed towards the other was a graceful spectacle, and when that Presence was hovering near, when it was seen approaching to lay its cold hand upon the sister's brain, and snatch away her reason for a time (it might be for ever), it would have shaken a strong heart to watch the two making their way through the fields, pausing at every stile, and sobbing as though the hour of everlasting parting had arrived; she on her road to the Asylum whilst sufficient intellect remained to carry her thither, he about to return lonely and despairing to the house from which its joy, its light, had vanished.

Lamb tells us, however, in his own bright, cheery, frolicsome fashion, that he himself spent several weeks very 'agreeably' in a madhouse at Hoxton; nor is this by any means an improbable experience, for if a patient fancies himself a sovereign, and in full possession of kingly honours; or an angel, and as such in the unrestricted enjoyment of celestial privileges, his state may not only be endurable, but positively delightful. It is one of the merciful prerogatives of insanity, in sundry cases at least, that it may fasten upon some fantasy which secures the sufferer a constant income of pleasure. The poor hypochondriac who, as the story runs, sat down each day in supposed regal splendour, to banquet upon the most sumptuous dishes, would have relished his meals as rapturously as any genuine monarch, but for one failing in the viands which his delusion could not conquer: they always tasted, as he confessed, very much like plain porridge—which, in fact, they generally were.

Thomas Campbell's dismay may be imagined when after losing one child, another son of whom he had formed the proudest expectations betrayed symptoms of mental aberration. 'What can I make of him?' cried the poet in his agony. 'Education carried further must be hopeless: he is getting old enough to be active about nothing; must he ever be a blank?' Down the distracted parent felt he must lay all the projects he had entertained of his boy's ultimate recovery. 'I can never make anything of Thomas,' was his touching wail. Yet the torn heart of the poet would give a hopeful bound, and his face would gleam with transient brightness, if the youth ever uttered a remark which seemed to manifest returning intelligence.

One of the most pathetic of sights must have been the household of James Beattie, the gentle and amiable author of the *Minstrel* and the *Essay on Truth*. Some years after marriage his wife began to manifest symptoms of eccentricity, which rendered his home almost intolerable, these gradually deepening until they took the form of pronounced insanity, and it became necessary to place her under restraint. He had two sons to whom he was tenderly attached, and upon whom he rested a parent's fondest hopes; but his mind was tormented by the fear that they might be tainted by their mother's malady. Far from robust in health at any time, the eldest succumbed to disease soon after he reached his majority, and the stricken father, after writing a short memoir of the youth, sickened of his literary pursuits and determined to use his pen no more. He had one beloved child left him, it is true, and upon him he concentrated his affections with trembling eagerness. Should *he*, however, be summoned from that doleful house, what would remain for the poor deserted man? True to his forebodings there came, and speedily came, a day when it was needful for him to take his

last lingering look of the youth's face as he lay in his coffin. 'I have now done with the world,' sobbed the tortured parent. Stunned by such repeated smitings from the staff of affliction his brain appeared to lose its full consciousness of life. Memory signally failed him, even in the most painful of all points, for sometimes he could not tell what had become of his darling Montague, but rambled from room to room in search of the truant, and then inquired of his niece whether he had not a son, and, if so, where he could possibly be? But the runaway had doubtless got amongst the angels, and was hiding with them, knowing that his good father would shortly come to seek him in their society. For three years, however, the lone man continued to exist, burdened with this load of sorrow which men call life, and which makes the stoutest stagger when the props of pleasure are all removed. One comfort the minstrel had in the early removal of his children—they had not lived to have their intellects 'mangled into madness.'

Some careers again have been saddened, perhaps withered, by the malevolence which genius or celebrity occasionally evokes. What can we say, for instance, of poor Miss Landon? There, a young life was wantonly blighted, and a deadly shadow cast over a joyous heart naturally formed to revel in the honest delights of existence. The slanderers shot their shafts at her as cruelly as the archers drove their arrows into the quivering frame of St. Sebastian. Why one so pure, so sunny, so capable of social enjoyment, should have been haunted by a mocking malicious spectre for the best part of her days, is one of those dark problems which it is impossible to solve. Then, when married, she found herself mated to an individual with whom she could have little sympathy, and though removed from the presence of her persecutors, it was to suffer exile to the great

African cemetery which had been so appropriately labelled 'the white man's grave.' But, most tragic of all was the last scene of that poor woman's career. Out of this world she went in darkness and awful mystery. Whether impelled by the torture of years of calumny, and the hopelessness of ever obtaining relief in this mortal state, she purposely ended her own days; or whether she slipped out of life the victim of a natural mistake, who can tell? The curtain is down, and none can now peer behind it to inquire or explore.

Again, how frequently and how painfully the dungeon has figured in the history of genius! Sometimes men have suffered in this way for their writings, sometimes for their extravagance or improvidence, and not unfrequently for their very virtues. Ponce de Leon, one of the purest and most pious of Spanish poets, whose whole life was devoted to religious purposes, was thrown into the caverns of the Inquisition, and kept there for five years in gloom and utter desolation. His sole offence was a translation of the Song of Solomon into Castilian verse. Cervantes was languishing in prison for debt at the time Philip III. saw a student walking along the banks of the Manzanares convulsed with laughter, whereupon the monarch exclaimed that the man must either be mad or reading Don Quixote.

Indeed, any writer who was imprudent enough to live in those darker centuries might fairly expect to be imprisoned on the most trivial pretext. Rising a free man, and, as he might think, an innocent man too, it was quite possible he might find himself in a subterranean cell before evening, and this without a single word of explanation. It was the way of the times. Quevedo, one of Spain's greatest writers, was arrested at midnight at the house of a friend, and hurried away to a villainous prison, where he was treated with the utmost barbarity. So

unhealthy was the place, so wretched the diet, that a serious illness ensued, and though his body was spotted with ulcers, all help from the doctor was denied. His property was confiscated as well. When at last an inquiry was instituted into his case, it was ascertained that the libel which had led to his capture and imprisonment was not of his production at all! But even when released the sufferer found it impossible to obtain restitution of his sequestrated estate, and was forced to retire to the country and languish upon the miserable remnant of his fortune.

Verily it is a galling thing when, instead of receiving rewards, writers find that they have to pay heavy penalties for their works. Whilst some are crowned in the Capitol, others are unceremoniously thrust into a dungeon. The difference in literary desert may be small, or it may be wholly in favour of the captive, but the world has strange ways, and not unfrequently punishes where it ought to praise.

More especially must it be provoking for a man to be dragged down from the heights of Parnassus by an officer, and bundled off to some dank, dripping cell, because he happens to have incurred the censor's suspicions, or because he has written some innocent verses which are supposed to be loaded with high treason. Certain writers have frequently suffered in this respect. Béranger, for instance, was oft in danger, oft in woe. One edition of his poems cost him an imprisonment in Sainte Pélagie, and another a dose of duress in La Force, in addition to a fine of 10,000 francs: the latter indeed his friends cheerfully paid, but the personal penalty they could not undergo, otherwise there would probably have been admirers enough to divide the infliction amongst themselves at the rate of a few days apiece. A subscription captivity would be a benevolent novelty.

De Foe's political writings, and, scarcely less, his political labours, brought down upon him a storm of hostility under which he would have been wrecked had not his courage been lofty, and his resolve unconquerable. He was subjected to annoyances of the most ingenious description. Creditors were set upon him. Dormant claims were stirred up, and sleeping lions roused to attack him. Sham writs were issued and pretended officers sent to arrest him. He was sometimes waylaid or dogged into dark passages and assailed. His house was marked for destruction by the rabble. He was repeatedly cautioned by his friends not to show himself in the streets, and at one time he had some intention of remaining at home at night, and of wearing a piece of armour on his back by day; adopting the first of these precautions because he felt persuaded that his foes dare not do their work in open light, and the second because he suspected they were too cowardly to stab him in front. In one number of his *Review* he observes that he had before him at the time fifteen letters from gentlemen who had faithfully promised to come and kill him by a certain day; some of these individuals being so good as to apprise him of the mode in which the ceremony was to be executed. 'Thus,' said he, 'I am ready to be assassinated, arrested without warrant, robbed and plundered by all sides. I can neither trade nor live; and what is this for? Only as I can yet see, because there being faults on both sides, I tell both sides of it too plainly.' Once indeed he had to make the acquaintance of that 'Hieroglyphic state machine contrived to punish fancy in'—that is to say, the Pillory—in commemoration of which he wrote a hymn, the like whereof is not to be found in Watts or Wesley, in Cowper or Keble.[1] Poor Daniel, in fact, had very bitter experience of

[1] Wilson's *Life of De Foe*, vol. iii. pp. 187, 191.

dungeon life. At one time for debt, at another for libel; now for misfortune, now for sedition, he went into captivity with a certain amount of Jewish regularity. He was accustomed to be ruined. Most of the debts he discharged cost him, as he intimates, forty shillings in the pound, and his creditors half as much to recover them.

But De Foe had other sorrows. The keenest, cruellest blow of adversity came from his own offspring. To prevent the confiscation of his remaining property, he conveyed it to one of his sons under an express trust, legally evidenced, that it should be held for the benefit of his (Daniel's) wife and unmarried daughters. When the danger was passed the unnatural fellow repudiated the obligation. He converted the property to his own use. He suffered his two spinster sisters and 'their poor dying mother to beg their bread at his door, and to crave, as if it were an alms, whilst he was bound under hand and seal, besides his most sacred promises, to supply them with money'—himself at the same time living in profusion! 'It is too much for me,' continued the heart-broken father. 'I can say no more.' And then writing to his son-in-law, Mr. Baker, he implores him, as a dying request, to stand by the wronged ones when he was gone, and assist them by his counsel.

But though a prison is by no means an inviting place, the Muses have not shrunk from visiting their favourites there, nor have more celestial Presences refrained from hallowing the gloomiest cells by their gladdening company and their inspiring communications. Amongst dungeon productions may be reckoned some of the noblest works which ever came from human pen. Raleigh's *History of the World* is one of those grand colossal structures which, eyeing it without knowledge of the conditions under which it was reared, we might have

ascribed to some literary giant working in the prime of his powers, with all his energies at full command, and with access to every quarry where pure marble or imperishable adamant could be procured. And yet it was the labour of one lone man, worn with toil, enfeebled in body, broken in fortune, bruised in spirit, and buried in a fortress, where the ghosts of a thousand murdered captives might have gathered nightly (if the dead do haunt the scenes of their despatch) to scare him from his task.

And what shall we say of that immortal epic, the Christian Odyssey, the believer's Road Book to Heaven, the Itinerary to the Celestial Land, which was composed in gaol by the great Dreamer of spiritual Dreams? Rarely has a prison been more gloriously visited or more brilliantly illuminated than the quaint old building upon Bedford Bridge. Bunyan expected to lie there until, to use his own picturesque metaphor, 'the moss grew upon his eye-brows;' but we know that within those four walls there was more spiritual life and activity than within the proudest tabernacle in the land. That man must have held a levée of angels every day of his incarceration. And when the dungeon doors were opened there flamed out a light which could have been kindled at no human source, and which will continue to gladden and comfort mankind with its never-dying splendour.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

BUT amongst the many foes which Genius has had to encounter, one of the direst and steadiest has been poverty. It is never a pleasant thing to have a wolf howling at your door. It always makes dreary music for the dweller within. Yet that mythical animal has been particularly troublesome to poets. It seems to have a spite against the tuneful throng. When it discovers a young man with a turn for rhyme and a distaste for ordinary toil, it has a fiendish pleasure in following him up several flights of stairs to his miserable chamber, and, stationing itself at his door, keeps up a terrible cry all through the night and often right through the day. Many, indeed, have perished under its cruel fangs, whilst others have been mangled so severely during their early career that the scars have remained upon their souls to the end of life. Verily it is a right vicious beast.

Indeed, in the records of literature we find traces of men who seem to have adopted insolvency as their natural state of existence. They might have been born to bankruptcy. They came into the world without a shilling of fortune, and seem to have passed through life with a bailiff at their heels; they were always being served with writs of summons, and their goods, if they had any, laboured under periodical executions; they seemed to be quite at home in gaols or sponging-houses,

and the only obligation they discharged in full, and this very unwillingly, was the great debt of nature. If they could have offered this last stern creditor half-a-crown in the pound they would have done so with composure, and if there had been any chance of tricking the grisly king out of his claim altogether they would assuredly have tried the experiment. Grub Street in London, or the Rue des Cannettes in Paris, could have produced scores of unfortunate souls of this description.

Amongst our own more illustrious insolvents perhaps no name presents itself more readily than that of Goldsmith. The creator of the immortal Doctor Primrose was generally involved in pecuniary difficulties. His was a terrible struggle with Poverty, from whose talons he never fairly got free. She played with him as a grimalkin does with its victim, relinquishing its grip for a moment, giving him a little start, and then pouncing upon him anew as soon as his heart began to beat with hope. Whether studying in Edinburgh, wandering in Holland, teaching at Peckham, slaving in Griffith's garret, giving suppers in the Temple, or consorting with the first spirits of the day at the club in Gerrard Street, Penury was ever at his heels, pursuing him with as merciless a foot as the old avengers of blood. It might not seem at all extraordinary that the enemy should persecute him whilst he lived with the beggars in Axe Lane; or whilst acting as an usher in a wretched school, and discharging duties more painful than those of an 'under-turnkey in Newgate;' or, again, whilst he was spinning out his brains as a bookseller's hack in a miserable attic; but it seems strange that she should follow him to Sir Joshua Reynolds' or to Lord Clare's; that she should torment him at Academy dinners, and at last chase his very corpse to the door of Westminster Abbey when carried thither to find such rest as a monumental tomb affords.

At one time, indeed, the harried man contemplated an entire reform in his finances. He would put less sugar in his tea, and place brickbats in his grate in order to burn less coal. Instead of pictures on his walls he would hang the room with thrifty maxims, which he would write out himself on sheets of paper, and get his landlady's daughter to frame with parings from his black waistcoat. Look whichever way he might, his eye should be caught by some economical precept, such as 'Mind the main chance,' or, 'Take a farthing from a hundred and it will be a hundred no longer.' Most of us know what came of this fit of frugality. After passing the strongest resolutions, Oliver was more likely than ever to be dunned for milk scores, or arrested for arrears of rent.

But who does not feel touched, almost to tears (say one or two pardonable drops at least), at the poor fellow's reply to Mrs. Milner when she reproved him for squandering his small salary as usher in relieving beggars and treating schoolboys. 'Had you not better,' inquired the mistress, 'allow me to keep your money for you, as I do for some of the young gentlemen?' 'In truth, Madam,' replied the tutor meekly, feeling that he was on a level of business incapacity with the humblest urchin in the establishment, 'there is equal need.'

If ever a man of Genius may be said to have lived, for the most part, an insolvent life, and certainly to have died an insolvent death, it was Sheridan. A letter he wrote on one occasion to a friend, asking for a remittance, was marked in the corner 'Money bound'—that is, becalmed for want of cash: and this may be taken as an apt representation of his whole career. Indeed, if he could not have left the world until all his pecuniary obligations were discharged he would unquestionably have been with us still. Singularly significant too is the anecdote of his

encounter with a person whom he challenged to guess how he had procured a pair of new boots which he had just mounted. The individual, knowing much of Sheridan's wiles, indulged in a number of surmises: the articles might have been borrowed, stolen, obtained on credit, certainly they could only have been acquired in some irregular fashion. 'Give it up?' asked the orator with glee. 'I'll tell you, then—I paid for them!' Would it be permissible to indulge in a suspicion, it is scarcely possible indeed to avoid it, that when he entered into a new state of existence he would be disposed to ask almost the first soul he met, 'Will you lend me £50 in your currency, whatever it may be, and take my note for repayment at the Greek Kalends, or whatever may happen to be your impossible date?'

It almost excites a shudder to think that the redoubtable Samuel Johnson should ever have been arrested for debt. That any tipstaff should have dared to lay hands upon that awful form, and to make a caption of the great moralist, appears little short of rank impiety. Yet this profane exploit was performed in the year 1756 for the despicable sum of five pounds eighteen shillings; and it was only by borrowing six guineas of Richardson that the defendant obtained his discharge. The only thing which can possibly palliate this shocking indecency, and relieve the bailiff from immortal ignominy, is that when the outrage was committed Johnson had scarcely ascended the 'throne of human felicity' (his club chair), or been acclaimed as the 'Great Cham' of Literature. But inasmuch as the deed was actually done, who would not wish to have been present to see how the illustrious debtor demeaned himself on the trying occasion? Would he address the culprit, for culprit we cannot help regarding the poor process-server however innocent in himself, in thundering words and portentous sentences, such as he used

when he laid the scourge to the back of Lord Chesterfield with such measured and musical strokes? Or would he, instead of resorting to the ponderous Johnsonese which he employed in his writings, have knocked the man down (figuratively speaking) with one of those smiting, smashing, repartees which he so frequently used in colloquial intercourse, and which so often silenced Goldsmith, or reduced the ever-obtrusive Boswell to pulp?

But, verily, it is a melancholy state of things if a man's cheek pales and his pulse gives a vicious leap whenever a knock is heard at the door. Such was the case with Leigh Hunt for a long period of his life. Rat-tat-tat!—what did that mean for him? Most probably that some catchpole was coming to hustle him away from his family, or that an execution was about to be levied on his goods. Breathlessly he waited till danger had passed his threshold, or the appearance of some harmless visitor afforded him a temporary reprieve. 'Last Friday,' says he, on one occasion, 'I was sitting down to dinner, having just finished a most agitating morning, when I was called away by a man who brought an execution into my house for forty shillings. And it is under circumstances like these,' he added, 'that I always write.'

Yet when the dreaded hour of captivity arrived no one knew better than he how to turn a prison into a pleasant retreat. His cell in Horsemonger Lane Gaol might have been taken for a cottage in Arcadia had a visitor entered it without knocking at the bolted gates, and without submitting to the scrutiny of wakeful warders. The eye was pleasingly hoaxed, for the walls were papered with a trellis of roses; the ceiling was covered with clouds and a mock sky, whilst the windows, whose bars would have told an ugly tale if bared to view, were screened with venetian blinds. Flowers supplied scents for the nostrils,

and a piano furnished sweet sounds for the ear; whilst bookcases loaded with favourite authors afforded a rich store of material for the mind. This was not all. Outside the room there was a little yard separated from a neighbouring ward by some rails; this dreary bit of space was forthwith enclosed with palings, and adorned with a trellis which bubbled over in Autumn with scarlet runners. Soil being procured from a nursery, a grass-plot was formed, and a thick border of earth run round the little domain, and there flowers were reared and young trees were planted. Those flowers were admitted to be 'perfection,' and out of an apple-tree a pudding was triumphantly extorted during the second year of his sojourn. In that sylvan retreat—such is the force of imagination—the poet wrote or read when the days were fine, and there he was visited by brother bards and libellers (unconvicted sinners) like Byron and Moore. Calling in illusion still further to his aid, the captive parcelled out his little territory into imaginary districts. 'I made a point,' said he, with airy humour, 'of dressing myself as if for a long walk, and then putting on my gloves, and taking my book under my arm, stepped forth, requesting my wife not to wait for dinner if I was too late.' That delicate touch of gaiety could hardly have been surpassed had the man been living, brimful of bliss, in the garden of Eden itself.

Strange methods of exorcising the fiend of poverty have sometimes been adopted.

John Stow, the London Antiquary, heard the wolf howling loudly at his door when he ought to have been resting from his useful labours. He applied to the Crown for assistance, and the Monarch (James I.) was pleased to grant him what Charles Knight bluntly terms a 'patent of beggary.' It was a Licence addressed to all the clergy, magistrates, constables, and other

officials, as well as to all his Majesty's subjects generally throughout thirty-six counties, authorising the said John Stow to ask, receive, and take alms and gratuities from all the charitably disposed without any let or contradiction on the part of the authorities; and it further enjoined all parsons, vicars, and curates to stir up their congregations by publishing the royal notification, and exhorting their flocks to contribute liberally to the relief of the worthy bearer. In plain English, this was a charter of Mendicancy. What a treat it would be in these modern days, if, after encountering five thousand beggars on the highways—the least number an ordinary pedestrian can count upon meeting in a lifetime—we could fall in with one as genuine and deserving as was John Stow, tailor, near the Pump, Aldgate, whose writings had cost him 'many a weary mile's tramp, many a hard-earned penny and pound, and many a cold winter night's study.' Who would not have a ready shilling for an honest enthusiast if he could assure us that he had spent his days and his means in learned search for ancient books, manuscripts, and monuments for the benefit of the public? Should we not offer him, five, ten, twenty—perhaps more?

Of course it must be sorrowfully admitted that in too many cases the money-miseries which befall the sons of Genius are self-invited, indeed self-compelled. Sometimes they are the result of sheer improvidence, sometimes they are the inevitable consequences of dissipation. For wilful sufferers of this description little compassion can be claimed or conceded. It is otherwise with men who have undergone pecuniary shipwreck without any notable fault of their own. Not to mention such a conspicuous illustration as that of Scott when Ballantyne's bankruptcy reduced him to penury, who can think of Thomas Hood's disasters without the deepest regret? The failure of a firm,

with which he was associated let loose the winds of adversity and brought them howling about his little barque. The tempest was sore; for one trouble followed another, and long he struggled in the hope that the vessel would right itself eventually. But, driven upon the rocks, there was no escape, except with bare life. Left without a shilling, for he gave up all to his creditors, he determined to work off the whole of his liabilities by literary toil, instead of flying to the Bankruptcy Court for relief. To carry out this purpose, he withdrew to the Continent, where, spite of illness, and spite of the heavy burden of care he bore upon his shoulders—a burden which might have been expected to crush out all that was comic within him—he laboured for some years, not to retrieve his fortunes, but simply to square accounts with mankind. It was banishment to him; for he had to live during a portion of his exile, as he complains, with people whose only talk was about 'thalers, thalers, thalers,' and whose 'best attempts at wit and humour were like yeasty dumplings a day old.' Six years he remained abroad, and when he returned his health had been so shattered that from an 'author,' as he said, 'he had been reduced to a mere pen, which was incapable of being mended.' Indeed, to use his own amusing expression, it would have been a bad bargain for him to have 'changed constitutions even with Spain.' 'Still,' persisted he, 'I must die in harness like a hero or a horse.'

But there cannot, in the nature of things, be much sympathy for the confirmed literary mendicant—the reckless Bohemian who sponges upon the public, borrowing from the charitable without a thought of repayment, expecting when ill to be cured gratuitously at the hospital, and calculating that, when dead, he will be buried at the cost of the parish. However free and joyous the dwellers in the darkly enchanted land of Bohemia

may have appeared, theirs has been but ghastly gaiety at the best. Henri Mürger, the prince of Parisian Bohemians, describes his comrades as men without food or hearth (*sans pain et sans foyer*); some of them, like 'the Delrosses,' spending half the day starving with hunger and the other half with cold; whilst, as for himself, he reports that for the last three weeks he had 'lived a Hell'; and that he had expended his last copper in search of a fitting place where he could blow out his brains.

'It is remarkable,' says Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, speaking of these literary outlaws, 'how, almost without exception, they ended their career in gaols, mad-houses, hospitals, or garrets, whilst Alexandre Dumas himself was to die literally without a *sou* in his pocket.' Their motto, in fact, as has been aptly said, was 'the academy, the hospital, or the Morgue.'

Now much lamentation has been expended upon the subject of poverty in connection with the gifted!

Let it be freely conceded that if a genius declines to take the needful steps to preserve himself from want he has a perfect right to do so, provided he keeps his hands out of his neighbours' pockets. But in this case is he entitled to complain that he is left in penury? It may be said to be his own choice. Clearly whilst on earth he must do as the terrestrials do. There is no help for him otherwise. When he learns that the *avidus venter*, the insatiable organ of digestion, is practically the ruling power in our planet; that he must cater for it day after day whether he likes the duty or not; and, further, that no inconsiderable portion of his energies must be expended in keeping it in good humour, he is bound to accept the position with resignation, and to submit to the insulting necessity of making his brain labour for the benefit of his stomach. That devouring viscus costs every man a terrible sum per annum, but this is a

tax we pay for the privilege of living, and, like (very like) the Income-tax, it appears extremely improbable that it will ever be greatly reduced in rigour, still less absolutely abolished.

Such being the case, we might fancy that if there were one principle which an honest, high-spirited man would recognise as imperative, it would be the duty of maintaining himself, and of living within his own income instead of his neighbour's. The humblest labourer, with a spark of bravery in his breast, would (or should) feel himself disgraced if he knew that he was a burden to others and an incubus upon the energies of the community.

But, strange to say, it is precisely here again that we frequently encounter the plea of Genius as an excuse for error or recklessness. And it is precisely here again that there arises the simple but irresistible retort: Is an exceptionally gifted individual entitled to be better or worse, stronger or weaker, wiser or sillier, nobler or meaner, than the rest of mankind? Can it be possible that the very property which qualifies him to figure as more than mortal empowers him also to act as less than mortal?

Now, what is Improvidence? Is it a token of superior wisdom or superior folly? The one kingly faculty which a man should possess if he wishes to put his powers to the best use, and to make his life of eminent service to himself or to his fellows, is precisely the faculty of self-government and self-restraint. Nothing can atone for the absence of this sovereign property. Without it genius may scatter its splendours unprofitably, and the finest talents may be idly wasted, or, worse still, perniciously employed. Of what avail is it to be large in intellect if the will is incurably weak? We should think little of a gallant ship, however perfect in her equipment,

if told, as she floated past in all her bravery, that she had neither compass to guide her in her course nor rudder to rule her in a boisterous sea. Assuredly, it is one of the most mocking facts in human history that a being who claims to be a born ruler in the realm of mind should not even be master of himself. So mighty is he that he can call up spirits at pleasure from the vasty depths of thought, and send them hither and thither to do his bidding, using them as facile puppets to make sport or do work for mankind; and yet so feeble is he of purpose and so infirm of resolve that he cannot manage the mere business of living with moderate success. Lord of the regions of imagination, and yet a slave at his own hearth!

Much mischief has been done by the notion that an author or an inventor stands upon a different footing from other mortal craftsmen, and that if things don't go well with him he ought, as a matter of course, to be maintained in the national Prytaneum —a classical designation for a superior kind of poorhouse.

The complaints which have been made about sundry men of genius, as in the wailings over Burns, seem to imply that they had a right to be looked after, as if they were helpless creatures who could not be expected to take care of themselves. This, if it were true in point of fact, is certainly not a very flattering view to entertain of the class. We might fancy indeed that it would be universally resented. Where is the gifted being who would be willing to sign a declaration of worldly imbecility in order to entitle him to a pension from the State, or a large subscription from the public? If a man takes up literary pursuits and makes these his vocation, he does so generally because they are congenial to his tastes. Why, then, should he expect the community to provide him with meat, drink, lodging, wearing apparel, or other comforts, except upon the usual terms?

For a poet who is out at the elbows to require the public to repair the rents in his garments, or for a philosopher whose funds are running low to wonder when he will receive a cheque from society, seems to be not merely an arrogant assumption of privilege, but an act of gross unfairness to all who are expected to contribute.[1]

Nor should it be forgotten that improvidence too frequently implies a deficiency of moral principle, and eventually involves a fearful degradation of character. No man, however grandly endowed, can sponge upon his fellow-creatures without loss of dignity. If he were capable of writing a *Faëry Queen* or a *Macbeth*, and yet were in the habit of coming to your door to borrow a sovereign, which you knew he would never refund, it would be impossible to treat him with much respect.

The history of many of our own Bohemians is the history of tricks and artifices, and even of positive frauds with a view to obtain money. Samuel Boyse (1708-1749), who was possessed of no ordinary poetic faculty, may be regarded as a pattern

[1] Let nothing be said in depreciation of public benevolence if applied to cases of genuine desert and honest necessity. The money which the State regularly appropriates as a reward to those who have distinguished themselves in literature or otherwise is a graceful gift, and it is much to be regretted that the fund is not vastly larger. But the point in question is this, What right has an individual, or his friends on his behalf, to expect that if he takes up the profession of literature he shall be supported by the State or by the public, any more than if he had adopted some other pursuit? Let it be borne in mind that the obligations of charity on the one hand are quite distinct from any claim to assistance on the other. If you saw a famishing man you ought to consider, on your part, whether it was a duty to provide him with a meal; but no one would say that he, on his part, was entitled to demand a dinner from your table, or to go to a refreshment house and obtain it at your cost, or to pick your pocket of an equivalent sum, with something over, perhaps, for a neat little supper as well. Philanthropy is a splendid virtue, and Heaven forbid that a word should be said in its disparagement; but it is equally clear that manly self-reliance, and a gallant grapple with the inevitable evils of life, are primary conditions without which no man has a right to lay any of his fellow-creatures under charitable contribution.

literary vagabond. He was one of those bards who, when on their way to Parnassus, would be sure to pull up at the first 'public' they discovered, and probably remain there; but if they did reach the sacred mount, and returned full of inspiration, they would be certain to turn in again and not leave until they were vastly fuller of alcohol. He pawned everything on which he could lay hands, and was sometimes compelled for want of clothes to remain in bed for days together. If a bookseller engaged him to execute a translation of a work, he would pledge the book before he had proceeded far; and on its being redeemed by its owner would advance a little further with his task, only to repeat the operation again at the cost of his employer, who found that he must either submit to each successive exaction or forfeit all he had previously paid. The reckless poet would obtain subscriptions to productions of which nothing more was ever written than the commencement and the conclusion. Occasionally he sent his wife to inform his friends that he was actually dying; and if she succeeded in obtaining any money, the benefactor might possibly meet the patient next day in a fair state of health, and find that the first use of his bounty had been to redeem sufficient clothes to enable him to face public decency, and the second to pay for a drunken sally at some favourite tavern. On one occasion we find him writing to Cave the printer for half a guinea, addressing his letter, in grim jargon, '*Ex Gehenna debitoria, vulgo domo spongiatoria,*' and stating that he had not tasted anything for two days, that the coat would be taken from his back to pay for his bed for the night, and that he should be carried half-naked from the bailiff's lair to the prison if help could not be had.

There is one singularly simple condition which applies to most forms of improvidence, whether exemplified in the case of

the greatest genius or the lowest tramp on the highway. Every person whose aid is solicited has a perfect right to say, 'My good sir, if you don't take sufficient interest in yourself to make provision against want and discomfort; if you decline to adopt the means which are in use amongst all prudent mortals for this purpose, how in the name of common sense can you expect others to trouble themselves about you?' Is it not the height of impudence to ask people to cater for one who does not choose to labour suitably for his own support? Need such a man be surprised if his fellow-creatures accept his own valuation, and believe him when he says practically, 'I am not worth working for'?

CHAPTER XVIII.

DESCENDING THE SLOPE.

WHEN Thor made his famous journey to Yötunheim, the land of Giants, one of the tests of strength which Loki prescribed to him, on his arrival at Utgard, was to wrestle with an old woman. The Lord of the hammer Miölner felt insulted, but undertook the task in prospect of an easy victory. For hours the two struggled, but Thor found, to his great surprise, that his prowess was utterly unavailing. At last he was brought down upon one knee, and probably would soon have been reduced to both had not night concluded the conflict. He then learnt who his antagonist was. He had been contending with a foe whom many have to encounter, but none can ever hope to overthrow; for night invariably descends upon the combatants, and closes the strife, however long it may have been protracted. His adversary was Old Age.

The Children of the Sun are not, by any means, remarkable for longevity. Some of the brightest of them have taken their departure at a comparatively early period, and many of them in the heyday of their celebrity. If life should be lengthened, there must come, sooner or later, failing faculties, crippled energies, clouded memory, tottering footsteps, and debilitated frame. The fires of Genius grow dim, and begin to flicker where once

they flamed with the greatest brilliance. The hand which wrote like that unresting limb which was seen at work hour after hour and morning after morning in Sir Walter's room in Edinburgh, as if it were some enchanted thing, must lay down the pen at last, or move it with shaking fingers, impelled by a shattered mind. The time arrived when Scott (says Lockhart) 'would begin a story as gaily as ever, and go on, in spite of the halt in his speech, to tell it with highly picturesque effect, but before he reached the point, it would seem as if some internal spring had given way; he paused and gazed around him with that blank anxiety of look that a blind man has when he has dropped his staff.'

Dark, indeed, as is well known, were the closing years of the Great Magician. Ruin came upon him when his fortunes might appear to a spectator to have reached their golden climax. The halls of Abbotsford had been built, its grounds planted, and the honours of a baronial chieftain secured; but instead of the repose he had so worthily earned, came the night of toil in which it was necessary for him to labour more vigorously than ever, although strength was decaying, hope was vanishing, and the fountain of fancy, so prodigal in its former issues, was narrowing its flow and beginning to trickle feebly and intermittently. How he went to work to deliver himself, and others who had misled him, every grateful reader of his books must well remember. The unresting hand plied the pen with heroic resolution: the well-worn brain stood to its tasks as bravely as its flagging energies would permit. This, too, spite of his warning to Mr. Somerville, 'Spare your head; I have taken too much out of mine.' More manly and memorable words have rarely been uttered on this earth than his exclamation, when adversity strode into his castle, and revealed to him the magnitude of the Ballantyne

disaster, as well as the hopelessness of contending with it except at the sacrifice of position and property—nay, worse still to a high-minded man, at the cost of personal credit. 'Nobody in the end,' said he grandly, 'shall lose a penny by me.' Good Heavens, what a world this would become if every mortal would say, *did* say, 'Nobody shall ever lose a single penny by me!' 'If I were to leave off work,' remarked Chateaubriand to a friend, 'I should ruin many. I have a million and a half of debts to pay (francs of course), and shall go on toiling till I die, or am solvent!'

But even in the mildest form, and as a mere intimation of coming possibilities, it is decidedly unpleasant for a distinguished writer to be informed that his powers are declining, and that the public are tiring of his productions. Referring to one of Thackeray's latest works, *The Adventures of Philip*, a London periodical opened its oracular lips to express the following opinion, 'Plot bad, Characters good, Moral dubious. It leaves Mr. Thackeray's reputation just where it was, and ourselves'—observe the all-important test of value—'in a state of placid indifference as to whether he writes more or not.' It was drily remarked of Sterne's publications, after a certain run of popularity, that each new volume was received with 'increasing *composure*.'

But how much worse is it to become acutely conscious of a great change whilst the mind retains all its sensitiveness in regard to this most painful of points! In his latter days Alexandre Dumas became a pitiable spectacle of withered credit. The wear-and-tear of a life like his had told upon his constitution, and in his enfeebled frame and miserable garb it was difficult to recognise the dressy and ostentatious beau of earlier years. There was still an affectation of gaiety, but under it, writes a

biographer, 'there lay a profound melancholy.' Do what he would to distract it, he knew well that he was no longer the witty, sparkling Dumas of other days. 'Hence it was that he felt himself obliged in his old age to quit Paris. His reputation was still great abroad, and he felt himself more at home in countries where they still saw in him the Dumas of old days, rather than in Paris, where he had to endure the indifference of managers and publishers.' 'You don't wish, then, to stay among us,' said Wolff, as he wrung his hand at parting. 'As little as I can,' replied the other; 'the only future left for me now begins at the frontier.' And yet this was the man who had said of himself, some years previously, 'I ask for nothing, wish for nothing. I envy nobody . . . If at my starting-point God had said to me, "Young man, what do you desire?" I durst not have asked from His omnipotent greatness that which He has been graciously pleased to grant me in his paternal goodness.'

After his power of writing books had vanished, Southey's love of reading them survived; but after his power of reading them had departed, what remained for the poor poet? Nothing but to walk round his library, and, taking down some of his beloved tomes from the shelves, to open and shut them mechanically. In noble natures the heart dies after the head, if at all; and Southey's affection for his books outlived his ability to commune with the faithful friends of his studious hours.

But, mournful as the spectacle of a failing intellect must ever be, matters are so skilfully and admirably arranged that the sufferer himself rarely knows the worst of the case. The process of decay is conducted so gradually, one faculty after another drooping insensibly, that he scarcely feels any jolt or jar in his progress to utter obliviousness. The memory, for instance, which alone keeps up the thread of our consciousness, is one of

the first powers to give way, but the more feeble it grows the less is it likely to trouble him with unpleasant reminiscences, or to suggest painful comparisons between the present and the past. For more than a year before his death, this same poet (Southey) spent his time as if in a dream, and apparently without any definite knowledge of his condition. Had his recollection continued as vigorous, and his consciousness as vivid as ever, what a mortifying spectacle he must have been to himself! But a kind Providence so manages it in such cases that, generally speaking, the sufferer is wafted gently into port instead of being tossed on the breakers or torn on the rocks.

Thomas Moore's brain began to soften some time before his decease. His mind ceased to work consciously, except at intervals, and then only for a brief period which rendered the glimmerings of reason in the socket all the more startling and impressive. For two years and two months, 'he may be said to have been on his death-bed, dying all that weary time.' One there was who watched over him with the indomitable devotion which a woman alone can display. His 'Bessy' never left the room for an hour at a time. When sensible for a short period, he would ask her to read the Bible, and he, once the gayest of the bards, Cupid's chosen songster, would sometimes entreat her to sing, not one of his own voluptuous compositions, but a simple hymn of which the burden was 'come to Jesus.'

Here too, as ever, if man would only interpret calamities carefully, it will be seen that the Allwise One may have a beneficent purpose to answer. What are all the infirmities of old age but hints from above that it is time to prepare for a change of scene? If Providence darkens the eye, what is this but an intimation that earth is about to fade from view, and

that it is the sufferer's duty to gather light from aloft, and to bring his organs of spiritual vision into preparatory play.

If the ear also shuts, does not this mean that he must now listen to the still, small voice, which whispers within him, and to the greater voice which speaks from above, mingled, as it is with the music of the heavenly harpers—the melodies which need no tympanum of flesh to carry them to the soul? And when infirmity excludes him from free communication with the outer world, what is this again but the call of God to the chamber of communion, where the Divine One may talk at leisure with his child, far from the distracting influences of secular life?

Nay, to use the beautiful figure which has been so variously expressed, but never more touchingly than by Mrs. Gaskell,—Does not the Almighty deal with His feeble servants 'as a tender mother does with her children when the time for rest approaches? She draws the curtain to shut out the light and every sound in the chamber, in order that, the outer world being excluded, her loved one may sink more quietly into a sweet sleep.'

What Dante said, as he entered the convent of San Onofrio, the sons of genius too frequently exclaim when they approach the darkening region of old age. A monk asked the great poet what he sought there? 'Peace!' was the curt, but all comprehending reply.

Nay, long before this dreaded period of decay is reached, the literary pilgrim has often to concentrate his wishes in the same passionate cry, 'Peace!' 'The world is too brutal for me,' wrote John Keats; 'I am glad there is such a thing as the grave. I am sure I shall never have any rest until I get there.' Whether the turbulence of life must *necessarily* be succeeded by perfect calm—the calm of those who 'softly lie and sweetly sleep low in the ground,' is an awful question; but is not the

expectation in many cases equivalent to an assumption that when a youth emerges from a troubled apprenticeship he will be *certain* to find himself in the enjoyment of manhood without any of its miseries?

The softening influences of suffering and infirmity were well exemplified in the person of Handel, when, after being couched thrice, he felt assured that the darkness of this world had settled down upon him irretrievably. He became perfectly resigned, says Mr. Haweis. Instead of manifesting impatience or irritability 'he grew gentle and subdued. He desired now to be at peace with all men, showed himself more than ever anxious to assist poor and suffering people by the performance of his music, and looked forward to his departure without anxiety or dismay. Latterly his thoughts constantly turned upon the subject, and he was heard to express a wish that he might breathe his last on Good Friday, in hopes,' he said, 'of meeting his good God, his sweet Lord and Saviour,' on the day of His Crucifixion.

And it was on Good Friday 1759 (or the day after) that the grandest of sacred composers realised, so let us hope, the scene which his imagination portrayed when he heard his *Messiah* first publicly performed. 'I did think,' said he, 'I did see all Heaven before me and the Great God himself.'

During her last illness, Mrs. Hemans would repeat to herself entire chapters of the Bible, and sometimes page after page from the secondary inspirations of Milton and Wordsworth. When those around her evinced their sympathy, she gave them to understand that though her body was on the earth, torn with pain, her spirit was living in a fair and happy world of her own, amongst gentle thoughts and pleasant images. 'No poetry could express, no imagination conceive, the visions of blessedness that flitted across her fancy, and made her waking hours

more delightful than those which were given to temporary sleep.'

It is said of Le Sage that, in his declining years, when his faculties were fast dying out, he became singularly dependent upon the sun. When that luminary appeared, and so long as it was climbing to the zenith, the lively author of *Gil Blas* grew brighter and brighter, but from noon to sun-set his powers underwent a gradual and perceptible obscuration. Then, when the orb of day sank in the west, the mind of the patient seemed to descend with it into the night of darkness and imbecility; so continuing dead to all earthly inducements until the Lord of Light returned to our hemisphere. May we not find a pleasant metaphor—a hopeful little allegory—in this curious fact?

It has been no uncommon thing, however, for some of the most brilliant, as well as some of the most sedately thoughtful of men to spend the latter portion of their lives in the Night of literal Dotage. For amongst the few human prophecies which are often fulfilled to the letter, stands Wordsworth's :—

> 'We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.'

Not many more melancholy illustrations are to be found than the history of Dean Swift presents, when we consider the singular sort of influence which this strange man wielded both in politics and literature during the reign of his Reason.

After controlling the movements of the Cabinet, taking a Prime Minister 'into favour' as he said, or else 'using him like a dog'; stretching out his quill as if it were a sceptre over Ireland, and constituting himself the ruler of that country; seating himself so firmly in the affections of his subjects that he told Archbishop Boulter, if he were to lift up a finger the

populace would tear him (Boulter) to pieces; yet this lordly being passed the last four or five years of his existence, partly in a condition of stupor and partly of open lunacy. Sometimes whipping his attendant from room to room, sometimes attempting to put out his own eyes, or inflict other mischief upon himself; his food being given him by morsels at a time, he continued to vegetate and digest until at length he sank into a state of silence which was only once broken during the year preceding his decease. And as if to invest this event with a grotesque importance, no sooner was it known, than the citizens of Dublin rushed into the chamber, and in their eagerness to preserve some memento of the dead Dean, stripped his head of every hair before a single hour had elapsed!

So with Bishop Warburton. For more than two years before his exit, this busy-minded prelate, a giant amongst controversialists, sank into a state of utter indifference to life and all its interests. The grand old polemic would fight no more. Let the war-trumpet sound as it might, it roused no answering throb in his heart. The loss of his son had worked this great collapse in his activities, and from that period he became the victim of incurable melancholy. Shortly before his end his mind seemed to force its way back for a short interval into the region of rationality, and he inquired of his attendant if his son were really dead. Falteringly, the answer was in the affirmative. Like the Hebrew king when his child was taken, he bent to the stroke; but unlike the minstrel monarch it was not to nurse his grief for numerous years: for the stricken prelate was soon permitted to go his way to seek the lost one in the land where partings as well as fightings are unknown.

Yet, spite of all infirmities, many of the aged have continued busy to the last. However the bodily tabernacle might decay,

the ethereal principle within has stoutly held its ground.[1] Even when Galileo was nearly deaf and totally blind, and though his discoveries had been so ungratefully received that he might well have wished to be done with a thankless planet, he would not abandon his scientific inquiries, but continued them in spite of the conviction that he was overtasking both mind and body. 'I cannot keep my restless brain from grinding on,' he remarked, 'although with great loss of time, for whatever idea comes into my head with respect to any novelty, drives out of it whatever I have just been thinking of before.'

Professor Daub, who was designated the Talleyrand of German philosophy, because he swore allegiance in succession to Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, wrote to a friend who urged him to seek relaxation: 'Holidays, do you say? No, my dear friend, not yet; nor do I want any: my heart's desire is, if possible, to die in my chair, *docendo*.' And he had his own way with Death. It was whilst lecturing that the blow came which virtually terminated his existence.

Intensely characteristic of Coleridge was his last communication to a publisher. Only two days before he died, according to Lamb, he wrote to a bookseller, proposing an heroic poem, the *Wanderings of Cain*, in twenty-four books. Yet this was the bard who had declared that twenty years were necessary for the gestation of an epic. Had that further period been vouchsafed to him, it is more than probable that this master of projects would not have executed half a canto.

Milton, when admonished by his physicians, that if he persisted in his labours, his sight would inevitably be lost, considered it his duty to persevere; he would not allow their

[1] Μέγας ἐν τοῦτοις θεὸς, οὐδὲ γηράσκει.
SOPHOCLES, *Œd. Tyr.* 872.

prophecies of evil to deter him from work, or even induce him to relax his exertions. 'I would not,' said he in his grand fashion, and with his opulence of classic illustration, 'have listened even to the voice of Esculapius himself from the shrine of Epidaurus, in preference to the heavenly monitor within my breast.'

After living for a full half century without Greek, Kriloff the Russian (like Lord Monboddo the Scotchman, and, still tardier in his day, Cato the Roman), bethought him that he would learn the tongue in which Plato wrote and Demosthenes thundered. A friend whom he consulted, Gnedick, told him it was too late to think of acquiring a language, and especially a language which would be Greek indeed, of the toughest kind, to a grey-headed pupil. The Fabulist, however, began his studies next morn, pursuing them in secret for a couple of years. Then happening to hear his adviser, who had translated the *Iliad*, and who was considered an authority on the subject, complain that he could not exactly understand certain lines in Homer, Kriloff carelessly offered an opinion, and construed them on the spot. Gnedick's surprise may be imagined when the Muscovite Æsop proceeded to render passage after passage wherever the great epic was opened, and on discovering the extent of the learner's attainments, he urged him earnestly to undertake a translation of the *Odyssey*.

Whether it was a wise thing on the part of Bishop Cumberland to commence the study of Coptic at the age of eighty-three, may admit of considerable doubt, but that it was a brave thing, no one will dispute. A man who in all probability had but a few years to live, and in fact died on attaining eighty-seven, might, perhaps, have found some more profitable occupation for his fast-waning hours, than the acquirement of a

language which he could never turn to much practical account, unless he had some idea that he was likely to be translated to a Coptic Heaven. In this respect he might compare with the learned scholar who began to study jurisprudence at such an advanced age that it was reported he intended to practise as an advocate in the next world. Still the Bishop's motive was excellent, namely, to master the version of the *New Testament* published in that language by Dr. Wilkins; and therefore, regarded as a mere recreation, the good man had surely as much right to amuse his senile years in the fields of philology, as he would have had to accomplish the same object by playing at chess or indulging in garrulous chat.

When turned eighty-two, Jeremy Bentham, who had been as fertile in the production of Codes as Sieyès of Constitutions, could write, 'I am still in good health and spirits, codifying like any dragoon.'

Madame Mohl says of Von Hammer, the historian of the Assassins, that he was a charming old man, who had written in all 130 volumes, and had 'just begun a History of Oriental poetry in twelve volumes, quarto, which he sometimes fears he shall not have time to finish.' Well he might: his age was seventy-nine when he commenced the formidable work.

Robert Chambers, after wading through an amount of work which was perfectly stupendous—for some of it involved enormous research and inquiry—undertook the preparation of *The Book of Days*. This was a miscellany of so varied a character, that the resources of the British Museum alone could supply the needful material. To accomplish his huge task, equivalent to the production of at least twenty biographies, as biographies go, he removed to London, where he toiled with the quiet energy for which he was distinguished. Untoward events threw upon him

even more labour than he anticipated. Nevertheless, 'work, work, work,' said he, 'went on to a degree which it is most painful to recollect.' He finished the production in due course, and it proved a great success. But the price was a life. 'That book,' said he, 'was my death-blow.'

It is not difficult to realise the despair of Trollope *père* in his race with old age and infirmity. This gentleman, although not a sworn *littérateur* himself, could use the pen as became the husband of a lady who wrote 115 volumes though starting at the age of fifty, and the father of two sons, who were similarly prolific. The work he had in hand was an Ecclesiastical Dictionary, which, of course, required considerable research, and, indeed, a large amount of labour. When Death sent him a hint that he should call upon him at no distant date, the poor man had only reached the letter 'D.' Here was a case in which there could be no abridgment of toil, no contraction of his scheme. Each letter must have due honour paid it. It was impossible to curtail 'M' or omit 'S' altogether. Two or three parts had already been published and delivered to subscribers, and therefore he stood doubly pledged to complete the work. Verily it was a cruel position to occupy. But bravely he persisted, though the greater part of the alphabet was still before him. All to no purpose, however. It was a struggle in which he could not hope for success, and the undertaking therefore sadly and completely collapsed.

Dr. Thomas Young, when visited by a friend (Hudson Gurney) during his last illness, was found busily engaged with his Egyptian Dictionary. Though fully conscious of his position as a dying man, he could not be prevailed upon to relinquish his labours. He must finish that work if possible!—at any rate he would not 'live a single idle day,' however little space might

be left him in this world. With him, in fact, it was duty and discipline to the last, as it was with the gallant troops in the 'Birkenhead' who went down into the waters, though they knew that their circling march on deck could not arrest the doomster for an instant.

Thomas Henry Buckle's death-cry at Damascus may be said to have vibrated through many lands where the earlier part of his wonderful *History of Civilization* had been read. 'O my Book,' exclaimed he, 'my Book!' as if in despair that, spite of all his industry, he must leave it incomplete.

'If I had 500 years of assured existence,' said an author; 'if I could employ every moment of that time in writing and collecting material for my works; if I took neither rest by day nor sleep by night, I could not execute a tithe of the works I have already planned!' That man had whole volumes—reams of paper—filled with the mere titles and outlines of productions he had imagined. Amongst them was a *History of Abandoned Theories, Speculations, and Institutions*, which, of course, meant a history of human thought and development; and another was a biography of each disease, detailing its progress and manifestations in a narrative form as if it were some individual thing, and illustrating it by striking cases and racy anecdotes as far as the subject would permit. His biography of gout, his life of a paralysed patient, as sketched, would each have required years for their due elaboration. What must have been the despair of such a soul when he reflected that he could no more execute his schemes within the compass of a short life, than he could rebuild all the cathedrals of Europe with his own hands?

Few more pregnant books have been published than the treatise *De Revolutionibus Orbium Cœlestium* of Copernicus, for its object was to introduce order and symmetry into the solar

system, to give the sun its rightful place as Lord of the Heavens, and to wipe out the vortices and epicycles with which the Ptolemaic hypothesis had littered the universe. Yet the cautious writer shrank from the publication of a work which he felt would revolutionise philosophy; the book lay in his desk, as he said, 'not only nine years which is the time Horace prescribes, but almost four times nine years;' and when, at last, it did see the light, and a copy was placed in his hands, his agitation became so great that it brought on a violent discharge of blood, which shortly terminated his existence.

The shadow of death was already stealing upon John Richard Green when he undertook the composition of his *Making of England*. Believing that he had only a few weeks to live, he addressed himself to the task, not merely with the devotion of an author, but with the ardour of a true patriot. His passionate interest in the Life of the People invested the duty with supreme importance. 'I have work to do that I know is good,' said he. Almost every moment he could wrench from overpowering pain was expended upon the book. Some parts were written thrice, others five times. Life, said his doctors, was kept within him by sheer force of will alone. Scarcely was the work printed than, spite of the darkening day and the nearing night, he resolved to make substantial changes in its plan. The impression therefore was cancelled. Told that he had only a few days to live, he touchingly craved a single 'week more to write some part of it down.' But before the first chapter was concluded his strength failed him, the mystic monitions could be no longer neglected; and then, but not till then, the light of earth fast fading from his eyes, did the brave toiler permit himself to say, 'Now I am weary: I can work no more!'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FINAL STAGE.

DR. HENRY, the historian, once wrote to his friend Sir Harry Moncreiff, 'Come out here directly: I have got something to do this week; I have got to die!' 'I am glad you are here,' said Mozart to his sister-in-law, on her calling one evening; 'you must stay with me to-night, and see me die!'

And this is what the sons of genius must do as well as the children of clay. For each there is a week, a day, an hour, in which he has 'got to die.' *Omnes una manet nox, et calcanda semel via leti est.* Death took no notice of Prince Kaunitz's interdict against the bare mention of his name, but came for the haughty noble in due course, though possibly at the cost of a stormy interview. The privileged phantom, who has the right of entry into palace as well as cottage, is not likely to forget his most brilliant victims. With uplifted hand and well-directed dart, he approaches them as confidently as he does the parish idiot or the worn-out pauper. No door is strong enough to shut out the King of Terrors, and no genius bright enough to maintain its glow after one chilling breath has issued from his lips. When he called for Christopher Smart, it would have been in vain for the poet to plead that he had entered into a contract with one Gardner, a bookseller, to write for him for ninety-nine years, and considered himself bound in honour to fulfil his engagement!

Robert Sands, one of America's most promising sons, composed a short poem on the 'Dead of 1832.' Not many days after its appearance, whilst engaged in an article for a periodical, and just after he had written the line, 'O think not my spirit among you abides,' he was struck with paralysis, and in four hours lay amongst the 'Dead of 1832.' On the manuscript there were several illegible characters extending nearly across the page, as if his fingers had moved on in darkness after receiving the fatal stroke, or as if the hand had been unwilling to forget its cunning at such an early age as thirty-three.

Thomas Hood's last letter, addressed to Dr. Moir ('Delta'), is characteristic of the writer's mingled humour and pathos. 'Dear Moir, God bless you and yours, and good-bye. I drop these few last lines as in a bottle from a ship water-logged, and on the brink of foundering, being in the last stage of dropsical debility; but, though suffering in body, serene in mind. So, without reversing my Union-Jack, I await my last lurch. Till which believe me, dear Moir, yours most truly, Thomas Hood.'

Like ordinary mortals the privileged ones have occasionally manifested extreme reluctance to die, and though obviously drowning in disease, going down palpably in the great abyss of futurity, have clutched their pens as if they were buoys which would float them to land again. The eccentric Ernst Hoffman could not bring himself to believe that his last hour had come, but when his lower limbs had virtually expired, and the little remains of vitality were retreating to the head, the body having become stiff up to the neck, he told the doctor that he would 'soon be through it now,' and declared that he would proceed with the dictation of the work he had in hand that very night! He was willing, he said, to give up the use of all his limbs, provided he could retain the power of keeping an amanuensis

employed, and when he had been cauterised in the back, he gaily asked a friend who came to see him if he did not recognise the smell of 'roast meat' in the house?

Never was man more frank in his utterances on the subject of our common mortality than Charles Lamb. The mixture of humour and horror with which he spoke of the grisly spectre, the half laugh, half shudder, with which he referred to the dread visitor who comes unbidden, and mostly undesired, was such as none but the quaint-minded Elia could have displayed. He was in love, he said, with this green earth. He would fain fix his tabernacle here, and 'never budge an inch' if it were possible. Could he only stand still at the same age, and keep his friends stationary too, he would wish for nothing better. To part from his darling folios would be intolerable, and to acquire knowledge by some act of intuition would be a lamentable substitute for the old familiar process of reading. All the metaphors employed to conceal the foulness of Death he rejected with scorn. He would have none of them. The very antidotes which were prescribed against the fear of dissolution were, in his opinion, an insult to humanity. To tell a poor man, for example, that he should 'lie down with kings and emperors,' he regarded as a gross outrage; for who would care to be a bed-fellow of a dead sovereign? He objected to the impertinent lectures which defunct people delivered from the tombstones, and denounced these as unbecoming familiarities. If he must necessarily quit the planet, he would 'wish that the last breath he drew might be through a pipe and exhaled in a pun.'

But it is positively appalling to see the gentle Elia, flushed with his subject, dart up to the grisly King, as it were, and seize him by the beard. 'Out upon thee,' he exclaims, 'thou foul, ugly phantom! I detest, abhor, execrate, and (with Friar John)

give thee to six-score thousand devils as in no instance to be excused or tolerated, but shunned as an universal viper; to be branded, proscribed, and spoken ill of! In no way can I be brought to digest thee, thou thin melancholy privation, or more frightful confounding Positive!' How he got through the encounter at last, who shall say? The Marquis d'Argenson observed, 'I notice that when the time really comes every one contrives to make the best of it.' 'The best,' it may be, of the mere physical process of dying, but what of the future? Every child that lives manages to get through the ceremony of birth, but its safe introduction to the world affords no clew to its coming fortunes or miseries.

'The act of dying,' said Edward Henry Palmer, the Orientalist, 'is nothing to what people think. I have been dead myself and ought to know.' The victim of bronchial disease, as his friends supposed, he was warned to prepare for his end; but, acting under the advice of an herbalist, he took a strong dose of lobelia, the effect of which appeared to be fatal. The chill of death seemed to fasten on his feet, and gradually crept up his frame, invading one limb after another until the lungs apparently ceased to play and the heart to heave. The doctor took his hand, but let it drop in token that the last pulse had beaten there. Marvellous to say, however, the patient recovered from this ghastly rehearsal of death, and, still more wonderful to relate, he found himself virtually cured of his consumption.

Not unfrequently the ruling occupation of a man's life gives colour to his parting hours. Malherbe, the poet, whose business had been the reform of the French tongue, and who was a perfect despot with regard to purity of speech, roused himself a few moments before his decease to reprove an attendant for the use of an expression which was not 'good French'; and when

his confessor attempted to describe the happiness of a future state, the dying precisian was so irritated by his inelegant language that he told him not to say anything further about Paradise, because his wretched style would disgust him with it completely.[1] The musician Rameau exhibited a similar sensitiveness in the matter of sounds; for when the curé who ministered to him in his last hours was going through the office for the occasion, the 'Newton of Music' (so he was called on account of his demonstration of the principle of Harmony) cried out indignantly, 'Que diable venez-vous me chanter là, monsieur le curé? Vous avez la voix fausse!'

Broussais, the author of *L'irritation et la Folie*, and the physician who traced all diseases to inflammation, when he found that a cruel malady was hurrying him to his grave, resolved to note its progress, symptom by symptom, and accordingly he kept a journal in which he recorded every phase of the disorder, with all the particulars which he thought might throw light upon its workings, or assist his successors in its treatment. When too feeble to write himself, he dictated to others, and was engaged in this occupation only a few hours before he expired.

Mozart's sister-in-law, seeking to dispel the well-known delusion which the mysterious Requiem had produced on the composer's mind, made light of his gloomy forebodings. 'No,' replied he, 'the taste of death is already on my tongue. I taste death!' And soon afterwards asking for the score of that darkly-bespoken composition, the tears standing in his eyes, he murmured as he glanced at his own music, 'Did I not tell you that I was writing this for myself?'

Bellman, the poet, who has been described both as a Swedish Pindar and a lyrical Hogarth, brought his jovial career to a close

[1] 'Ne m'en parlez pas davantage; votre mauvais style m'en dégoûterait.'

under striking circumstances. An improvisatore, with wonderful powers of mimicry, he would occasionally, when under the stimulus of wine, pour forth his effusions with singular prodigality, having first selected some music, which he would imitate, representing the sounds of different instruments with his mouth and fingers. When this light-hearted man felt that death was nearing him with rapid strides, he resolved to indulge the friends who collected round him, with one parting improvisation. All the night through he sang joyously, as one of his countrymen (Lenström) relates, and then took his farewell of each of the assembled company, varying the air and metre in order to express as far as practicable 'the individuality of the person addressed and the personal relation of the poet to him.' When the day broke, his friends, drowned in tears, implored him to cease his death-song, but replied he; 'let us die as we have lived—in music.'

Terrible were the concluding stages of Cardinal Mazarin's life. When his physician told him that his days were numbered, and that the number thereof was two months at the utmost, the sentence fell upon him like the decree of doom. In his very sleep he was heard to mutter, 'Guénard has said it!' When he awoke from his troubled slumbers, it was to reiterate the words, 'Guénard has said it.' If his friends, or, to speak more correctly, his visitors (for what friends could such a man have at such a hollow unprincipled court?) inquired about his health, his reply was sure to end with 'Guénard has said it, and Guénard knows his business well.' Four or five days before his decease, he ventured upon an odious freak, as if designing to outwit the last enemy for a time. He had his hair trimmed, his moustaches curled with irons, his cheeks and lips heavily rouged, and thus transformed from a pallid corpse-like sufferer into a painted

beau, looking never so fair and rosy as an observer relates, he was taken into his garden in a gay equipage, to impose upon the courtiers and cheat them (perhaps himself as well) into the belief that he was recovering his health. It was a startling and terrible metamorphosis. The effort, however, accelerated the end. Stung by the cruel remark of the Count de Nogent, that his eminence must be very ill because he looked very red, he was taken back to his bed, fainting; and all Paris was soon ringing with laughter at this foolish duel with Death, the heartless sycophants alleging that, as he lived a knave, so a knave he had resolved to die.

The stories about Rabelais' last utterances are probably fictions invented to fit the character of an inveterate jester, and to send him out of the world in profane masquerade. It is scarcely credible that the most impious wag would have been guilty at such a moment of saying, in reference to extreme unction just administered, that 'they had greased his boots for the great journey.' Scarcely more probable is the parting injunction ascribed to him—his last breath being used to point it with a burst of laughter—'draw the curtain, the farce is over!' For these and other tales, little faith can be found, unless we can bring ourselves to believe the horrible statement of the priest who attended him in his expiring moments, that he was drunk when he died.

There have certainly been men who have set out for Hades with a jest on their lips, but we may fairly assume that it is not for souls of the higher order to indulge in such ghastly gaiety. Not that a little cheerfulness is wholly out of place, if the patient is one who looks upon Death as a friend who comes as a courteous convoy to see him safely to a better land. We cannot help a sad smile at Sir Thomas More's remark to the officer who

accompanied him to the scaffold, when finding the steps somewhat unsteady, he observed, 'I pray you see me safely up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself.'

But the grand faculty of insight which, as we have seen, is characteristic of true genius, is just the one which should induce a man, nay, compel a man, to look solemnly, searchingly, into the Great Future, especially when a few moments will bring him face to face with the most awful of mysteries. Not then, certainly, will a sensible soul, parting with one life to enter upon another, and forsaking an old familiar world to commence existence in a new and unknown state, play the Merry-andrew, and put on the cap and bells to receive the awful King of Terrors.

Men like John Foster the Essayist, could go into the presence of their Maker calmly and trustfully. On the evening before his death he desired to be left alone. Not even when night set in, and his attendants begged that some one should be allowed to sit up with him during the dreary hours of darkness, would he consent to their stay. He needed no one to cheer him in his interview with the Grisly King, for he well knew that the spectre would come as the usher of Immortality. And so he did; for when next morning the chamber was entered, the good man had gone his way in charge of the silent visitor, and was fast solving the grand problem over which he had so frequently and reverently pored.

Not in loneliness, however, did the estimable Bishop Berkeley —the owner, according to Pope, of every virtue under heaven— finish his career. He may be said to have died *en famille*. His exit indeed was one of unspeakable placidity, and reads like some charming domestic scene. It was a Sunday evening. There lay the good prelate on a couch, in the midst of his household, with the

candles brightly burning, and his wife reading aloud for their common edification. After a time his daughter rose to offer him a dish of tea, but finding him asleep, as she thought, she gently endeavoured to arouse him. There was no response. There could be none: the Bishop was not slumbering, but dead. Whilst the family had been listening to the holy homily, a foot which falls without sound, and a form which walks without shadow, had entered the room, and softly signalling to the soul —as much as to say, Don't let us disturb the others—had beckoned it away to the Happier Land. So noiseless had been the great transaction, and so unexpected the summons, that the body was found to be cold, and the limbs all stiffened before the discovery was made. Was not this a very idyll of Death?

Literary exits, however, are not always, perhaps not often, amongst the brightest or most exultant. Melancholy, most melancholy, was Goldsmith's reply to Dr. Turton in his last hours. After feeling his pulse and intimating that it was beating at a more disorderly pace than the fever upon him justified, the medical man asked, 'Is your mind at ease?' 'No, it is not,' was the gloomy response! To what the patient specially alluded—whether to his embarrassed affairs (£2000 in debt) or to his spiritual concerns (possibly in direr confusion) cannot be surely known; but these were the last words he is supposed to have uttered. Not at peace—when nothing was worth a thought or a wish but peace!

Suicide has been no uncommon event amongst the gifted. Dr. Donne, indeed, wrote a treatise Βιαθανατος in palliation of self-murder, but he felt so uncertain about its arguments that he entreated his friends to bear in mind that it was written by Jack Donne and not Doctor Donne. He was wise enough of course not to illustrate his precepts by his practice. Mariano José de

Larra, one of the most striking and promising writers of modern Spain, perished by his own hand after an interview with a woman for whom he entertained an unhappy passion, but who treated him with cruelty and contempt. So stormy was the last scene that the poor man—irritated also by political disappointments and goaded to patriotic despair—rushed to death, a violent self-inflicted death; though he had not yet attained his thirtieth year.

John Erichsen was one of the most distinguished men that Iceland has brought to light. That quaint isle where the giants Frost and Fire meet in perpetual rivalry (the battle having lasted thousands of years, and neither having yet obtained the mastery) has not been without its literary heroes, but none of them have prosecuted the study of the Scandinavian writings with more ardour and success than the great scholar in question. His productions were numerous as well as diversified; and his labours for the good of his country and for the glory of the north generally rendered him an object of special admiration. But health broke down under his Herculean tasks, and a cloud of deep despondency settled upon his intellect. One day in 1787, whilst passing in his carriage over a long bridge which connects Zealand with the Almager Isle, he called out to his coachman to stop. The latter drew up at once, but whilst doing so he heard a splash, and, on looking, there was his master sinking suicidally in the sea!

Richard Tickell, doing 'what Cato did, and Addison approved,' flung himself out of the window of his apartment at Hampton Court, and fell so violently on the gravel walk beneath that his head made a hole a foot deep.

Jerome Cardan foretold his own death, and then killed himself, it is said, in order that the prediction might not be

numbered amongst the unfulfilled prophecies. In a like spirit, so it is to be presumed, Creech, the translator of Lucretius, having made a minute on his MS. that he would hang himself as soon as it was completed, was found *sus. per coll.* soon after his labours were ended. Perhaps it is possible, however, that as imitation is held to be the most expressive form of flattery, Creech wished to pay a delicate compliment to the memory of the Roman poet who closed his life in a similarly unworthy fashion.

On a summer's day in the year 1770 there came one 'frail form, a phantom among men,' into St. Pancras' churchyard, London, to wander amongst the tombs, and read the inscriptions; but so deep was he in thought that he did not observe an open grave which was yawning for an occupant. The youth, for he was not eighteen years of age, fell into it as if Death were eager for a stray victim, and had enticed him invisibly to the spot. When helped out by a friend who had accompanied him to the place, and who lent his services with a gay jest on his lips, the young man replied, 'My dear friend, I feel the sting of a speedy dissolution; I have been at war with the grave for some time, and find it is not so easy to vanquish as I imagined. We can find an asylum from every creditor but that.' Strange to say, within three days afterwards, Thomas Chatterton stood in need of a narrow home for himself, and, stranger to say, he had gone to seek and embrace the implacable 'creditor' of his own accord. How he died in his garret in Brook Street, Holborn, leaving the floor littered with his torn productions, and lying on his table that awful ironical will in which, with grim jocularity, he bequeathed a mourning ring to Mr. Mease, provided that gentleman would pay for it himself; the whole of his debts to the authorities of Bristol if they would discharge them; and all

his humility to the Reverend Mr. Camplin, although he said pride formed nineteen-twentieths of his composition; is not this all written in the history of our literature, where it will ever remain one of the darkest, saddest pages ever penned?

Scarcely less perverse and wretched was the fate of Caleb Charles Colton, the author of that remarkable treasury of sententious wisdom, *Lacon, or Many Things in Few Words.* Gaming was his favourite vice though not his only one. Vicar of Kew as he was, he made no scruple about figuring in the pulpit one day, and at a metropolitan 'hell' the next. So besotted was he by this infatuating passion, that after flying from his creditors and forfeiting his cure, he settled in Paris, where he became known as a professional gambler. There, it is said that in the course of about two years he won £25,000; but it is always difficult to hold the devil's money; it generally burns to the bone however daintily it may be handled; and in a short time the badly gotten heap had all disappeared. Driven desperate at last by a course of ill-luck, the miserable man fired a bullet through his own head; though in his book he had written that the gamester who destroys himself inflicts ruin, 'not only upon the body, but upon the soul, seeing that by the act of suicide he forfeits Heaven as well as renounces Earth.'

There is a grotesque story told of certain French wits, Molière, Boileau, Chapelle, Lulli, Barron, and others, who assembled one evening at the house of the great comic dramatist. They drank largely, they discoursed deeply. Life, they all agreed, was an empty thing, and the world a worthless place for sensitive souls like theirs: would it not be better for brave men to end an existence so far beneath their deserts, and from which so little enjoyment was to be reaped? Suppose they made up a sacrificial band, and all expired together, would

not that be an heroic event and throw the public into paroxysms of admiration? So it was resolved. After some consultation the company rose, to proceed to the river, into which they decided to throw themselves at once. Molière, however, either because he was unwell and had retired, or because he was overcome with liquor, was asleep when the discussion closed. Him they awoke. In a short time he followed them: 'Come to join us?' said the eager suicides. 'Not to-night,' replied the dramatist, who, having turned the matter over, intimated his opinion that the transaction ought to take place in the full light of day. It was too important a measure to be executed in the silent obscurities of the night. Had they not therefore better wait until the sun, and possibly a crowd of spectators, could see them proudly die? All agreed, returned to the house, and by morning had slept away their enthusiasm for death. This theatrical suicide in fact, never came off.

'Died in a duel' is certainly as frivolous, and, next to self-murder, as foolish a mode of ending life as can well be imagined. The surprising element in the case is its silliness. Whether challenging or challenged, the folly of the transaction is supreme, for however painfully the question of personal courage may be involved, the process simply gives the wrongdoer the opportunity of doubling his crime, and the party outraged the chance of losing his life, in addition to the injury he may have already sustained.

John Scott, the journalist, who fell in a paltry affray, was out on horseback not long before the event, when he was met by a friend, who remarked that he looked the perfection of happiness. 'And well I may,' replied Scott, 'for I consider a man, when mounted on a good horse, and riding with such a good wife as mine, to be as near to heaven as the conditions of humanity

will allow.' And all this happiness was relinquished in an instant out of deference to a custom which combines the puerility of the child with the brutality of the savage.

Who can think, without a feeling of bitter indignation, how much of Pushkin's life, and how much of Russia's literary fame, were sacrificed to a miserable squabble which did not merit the shedding of as much blood as could be drawn from the least vein in a man's little finger. Nor was this brilliant writer the only Muscovite genius who was slain in a senseless combat. Lermontoff, a brother poet, perished at nearly the same age, thirty-seven, in a quarrel arising out of some preference shown to him by a lady who had another admirer. The latter challenged the poet, who fell dead before he had time to discharge his own pistol.

More deplorable still is it for a man with his Maker's commission of genius in his hands to expire in a fit of intoxication. If certain accounts are to be trusted—and it would be comforting to believe them incorrect—Edgar Poe's death was the drunken climax to a drunken life. His star went out in shame and everlasting disgrace. On his way to New York, whilst halting for an hour at Baltimore, he betook himself to a tavern and began to carouse, spite of the resolution he had recently formed, and partially observed, to abstain from intoxicating liquor for the future. How he spent the night need not be related, but next morning he was carried helpless to an hospital, where, in a fit of delirium tremens, he perished at the premature age of thirty-eight. It is a terrible thing for a mortal created in the image of God to enter another world on all-fours, crawling like a quadruped into his Maker's presence; but what must be thought *there* when the being who approaches in this degraded fashion is one to whom the Almighty has intrusted some of the rarest and most ennobling gifts of intellect! Will not a brief note in Heaven's

Books constitute his whole biography—'Sent into the world a genius, came out of it a beast'?

After death comes, of course, the funeral, though sometimes the burial may precede the decease in a figurative sense. When Bishop Butler, the immortal Butler, had been in the wilds of Weardale for about seven years, living a secluded though useful life, his friend, Secker, who was wishful to place him in a more congenial position, took the opportunity of mentioning him to Queen Anne. Her Majesty replied that she thought he was dead. It is somewhat curious that a lady whose name has served to point many a jest, and whose demise is scarcely accredited at the present day, and even where accredited appears to be regarded as a very recent transaction, should have been so ready to resign one of her most valuable subjects; but when she repeated her impression to Archdeacon Blackburn, 'No, Madam,' replied that functionary, 'he is not dead, but he is buried.'

In some cases, however, a corpse has not been permitted to take its way peacefully to the tomb. It was a scandalous act to arrest Dryden's body for debt; but was it a pretty thing for the poet to flit to another state of existence, leaving creditors who saw no other way of realising their claims than by resorting to this extreme measure? One of the shabbiest things a mortal can do is to abscond from this world and hide himself in another, where he cannot be sued, and where he is at liberty (so he fancies) to set all his creditors at defiance.

It is a pleasure, therefore, to record that Favre (Vaugelas), who did so much for his native tongue, and spent thirty years over a translation of *Quintus Curtius*, but who died insolvent, entertained a sufficient sense of honour to direct the sale of his carcase to the surgeons in order to liquidate his debts as far as possible. There must have been something in that man, seeing

that he would doubtless have preferred decent interment to savage dissection! His indeed seems to have been one of those scanty cases in which an individual clearly perceives that he cannot discharge a debt by dying, any more than he can by leaving England for Australia, and saying nothing about his obligations.

But what of the funeral? One writer may be carried to the grave like the poet Davenant in the 'finest coffin ever seen,' whilst another may be conveyed to his long home like Walter Landor, in the commonest receptacle of the commonest make, borne by six of the poorest men to be had, the whole expense of the interment being limited by his express orders to six pounds.

Never perhaps has greater homage been paid to literature than in the obsequies of Victor Hugo in June 1885. These took place in Paris, where, of course, every event is valued according to the opportunity it affords for indulging in a spectacle. Provided any reasonable excuse for a pageant could be assigned, it may be doubted whether a Frenchman would care what kind of carrion he followed to the Pantheon or Père-la-Chaise. Probably no genuine Gaul would even object to lay down his life in mid career of glory if he could thereby ensure a magnificent interment, at the cost of the state, and be allowed to settle the programme of the proceedings himself. Like Mirabeau, he would exult in dying if it were the prelude to an 'Achilles funeral,' with a mob of excited mourners, and salvoes of artillery to give it unwonted grandeur.

For some days before Hugo's interment the body lay in state on the bed where he expired. Thousands came to inspect it, and outside the house people might be seen arranged in a *queue*, which extended into the next street, and which the

sudden squalls of rain could not diminish, still less dissolve. The orders given for *immortelles* and mourning badges were overwhelming, and on every hand memorials might be seen to testify that France had lost one whom it worshipped as its greatest man.

At the funeral, for which the Chambers voted 20,000 francs, a procession consisting of some hundreds of thousands of individuals, and comprising representatives of 1200 societies, clubs, and public bodies, consumed upwards of five hours in its march through the streets; every tree, lamp-post, balcony, ledge, or chimney-range, from which a good view could be obtained, being occupied by excited spectators. Of course the chance of an *émeute*, in the case of so emphatic a republican as the author of *Napoleon the Little*, and the possibility that the scene might be enlivened with a little bloodshed, contributed greatly to the interest of the occasion; but, making all needful deductions on this score, the larger part of the pomp was unquestionably an act of profound homage to the Hero of the pen.

In like manner all Denmark seemed to put on sackcloth when its great dramatist Oehlenschläger was interred. More than 20,000 persons, including the Crown Prince, and most of the public functionaries, followed the corpse to the grave in the church of Fredericksburg, in Copenhagen, whilst for three weeks the theatres were closed, and all popular amusements suspended.

Equally marked was the tribute paid by the Danes to their great sculptor, Thorwaldsen, when his body was borne to the tomb.

Alexandre Dumas (*père*) died in the midst of the great German War. He had expressed a wish to be buried at Villers-Coterets, but the hated Teutons were in possession of the place. An interim grave was found for him at Puy, near

Dieppe, where he had expired; and some four months afterwards the body was exhumed in order to be conveyed to the designated spot for interment. A crowd of literary men, actors, artists, and others, left Paris to attend the ceremony.

Some hundreds of people, suddenly landed in a small village, with a single hostelry for their accommodation, seemed to have but one thought at first—how they should breakfast?

The house was taken by storm, and the ravenous visitors spread themselves through all the bedrooms and kitchens, foraging everywhere for provisions, some contending for asparagus at a mock auction, others drinking wine out of copper saucepans, and a group feasting on pork pie, with a wheelbarrow for a table. When mass had been said at the church, and the procession reached the gate of the cemetery, a struggle, and indeed a fight, may be said to have ensued, for the company were so eager to obtain good positions, that a *mêlée* took place at the narrow entrance to the ground. In due time, however, the great novelist was laid in his silent habitation, under a salvo of funeral panegyrics, and there his body remains covered by a stone, bearing the simple but significant inscription, 'Alexandre Dumas, 1802-1870.'

The interment of Matthew Lewis was one of the strangest ever witnessed. In fact it may be said to have been perfectly unique, though in gloomy keeping with the tastes of the man who wrote the *Castle Spectre* and the *Monk*, and who, after Mrs. Radcliffe, was said by Hazlitt to have been the greatest master of the art of freezing the blood in England. Returning from one of his voyages to Jamaica, which he visited in order to mitigate the sufferings of the negroes on his estate—an estate pictured to him as a Paradise, but found to be an 'absolute hell,' owing to the tyranny of the overseers—he

was attacked by the yellow fever, which boarded the vessel, and claimed him as a victim. It was necessary to dispose of the body as soon as possible in order to prevent infection. It was therefore placed in a wooden cradle or shell, and a white sheet wrapped round it; but when lowered into its liquid grave, the weights, which should have carried it down into the dark ocean bed, became disentangled, and the wind, insinuating itself into the folds of the shroud, raised it so that it served as a sail. The coffin forthwith became a barque, and with Death at the helm, floated slowly away, whilst the living ones on board the ship gazed with a shudder at the singular spectacle, and wondered where the lone corpse would end its unexpected voyage.

One old practice served in many cases to attest a man's greatness, or at least his popularity. This was the composition of funeral laments. Straightway upon the death of a distinguished character, his friends and admirers broke into mourning eulogies, and paid him such compliments that it appeared as if the world might put up its shutters and retire into profound obscurity for the rest of its time. When Nicholas Peiresc left the planet, the regrets of the learned were so profound—for his extensive correspondence earned him the title of the 'Attorney-General of the Republic of Letters'—that elegies in forty various languages were produced, and these were afterwards collected in a volume called *Panglossia*. The modern plan is somewhat different: the Genius dies to-day, and to-morrow or the following morning at the latest a memoir is published in twenty journals. If he is a very prominent man, materials for the composition have been quietly collecting, and as soon as sufficient have accumulated, and the article therefore is likely

to become too long, the editor expects him to go off, and will be particularly obliged to him if he will do so just when there is no particular murder or parliamentary orgy on hand to afford the public its daily dose of excitement.

Then when interred, what monument shall be raised, what epitaph inscribed?

For many the name alone is the most eloquent of all inscriptions. Not a word more is required, for in their case the visitor's memory supplies all that is needful.

Some epitaphs, however, are notoriously misleading. They are little better than what Johnson would have called lapidary falsehoods. Remembering what a man Charles Churchill was, and what a drunken degraded existence he led, what can we say to this monumental fib?—

'Life to the last enjoyed here Churchill lies.'

The hapless poet begged that some little attention might be paid to his grave. 'Set one poor sprig of bay about my head,' he piteously implored. He was buried at St. Mary's-le-Grand at Dover, but for many years no one attempted to fulfil his request until at length a Deal pilot planted a bay on the spot. Spite of the good mariner's care the vegetable declined to honour the poet's ashes as it was expected to do, and a curious visitor, wandering amidst the tombs whilst his dinner was preparing, would look in vain for this indication of the satirist's resting-place.

The epitaph upon William Hazlitt's remains in St. Anne's, Soho, was in singularly bad taste, in fact rankly offensive. The injudicious friend who indited it seemed to think that the grave was a place where mortal enmities were not to be buried, but dismally perpetuated. The dead man was described as a hater

of aristocrats, and sundry others, 'who could not answer him before men;' and, as if to carry earthly squabbles into a future state, the denounced individuals were called upon to 'confront him before their Maker.' To render the matter still more ridiculous this defiant inscription closed with an intimation that the 'stone was raised by one whose heart was with him in his grave.' More the pity, if so, for poor William Hazlitt! He would lie with an uneasy colleague, and the pair would find little repose if they were to spend their time in discoursing about earthly distinctions or mortal animosities.

Not to such desecrated tombs, however, steals the

'Pilgrim grey,
To bless the tomb that wraps their clay,'

but where 'in yonder grave a Druid lies' the loving student comes oft, comes softly and silently, to bid the 'dear departed shade, meek nature's child, again adieu.' And whilst bending reverently over the hallowed ashes, may he not fancy that he hears the sighing strains which Collins, that minstrel of the tomb, poured from his Æolian harp, and wove into such gentle music for the dead?

Generally speaking, a skull can have few charms for a life-loving individual unless it belonged to a person of considerable note. Such grinning memorials of mortality may serve to assist a monk in his solitary devotions, or a poet like Young in his gloomy meditations by night, or a jaunty reveller like Byron in his junketings by day as well as night. But what shall we say of people who steal crania of repute, which they can only produce with the idiotic condition attached that they, the exhibitors, prove themselves to be either thieves or the accomplices of thieves? Must not their living skulls be as brainless as those which have long been emptied by the worm of corruption?

Some fifteen years after the death of George Crabbe the vault in which he was interred at St. James's, Trowbridge, underwent certain alterations in order to reduce the level of the chancel. The poet's head was stolen at the time, and no clew to the felon could be obtained. Many years afterwards a box was received by the churchwardens containing a skull which was stated to be the lost one, but affording no information as to the mode in which, or the person by whom, the relic had been purloined.

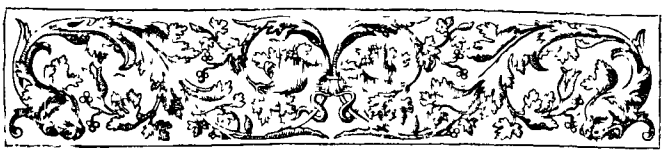
Molière's remains were transferred from the burial-place of St. Joseph to Père-la-Chaise in the year 1792. Several depredators seized the opportunity of plundering the skeleton. One, M. Cailhava, possessed himself of a tooth, which he unblushingly wore in a ring, and flaunted on his finger. Another, Baron Dénon, obtained a fragment of the skull, which was openly sold by auction when that famous traveller's treasures were dispersed. A third managed to appropriate a piece of the cheek-bone in the scandalous scramble, and had it mounted in silver. For this pilfered relic, which seems to possess an authentic pedigree, having passed through the collections of Dénon, Count Pourtalés, and Count Dessaix, an American offered the latter, it is said, no less a sum than £4000!

Is it not somewhat surprising that great people have thought so little of bequeathing their skulls to friends, if sums so large could be obtained in the market of curiosities? Had this been freely done we should undoubtedly have had collections of crania as we have of autographs; and friends would have invited us to visit their grim museums of celebrities, as strangers are admitted to vaults at Palermo, or the catacombs beneath Paris.

Miss Martineau bequeathed her skull to Mr. Atkinson, and also her brain, if her death should take place within a sufficient

distance from his residence to enable him to use the latter 'for purposes of scientific observation.' But this quaint legacy was revoked by a codicil, though the testatrix was careful to declare that the change was due to personal considerations, and not to any altered opinion respecting the importance of physiological inquiries. Had the bequest stood as originally intended, perhaps the Revenue officials would have claimed duty upon that wonderful cerebral pulp from which such a lengthy series of works emanated, and, if so, how would they have appraised its value for legacy purposes?

Jeremy Bentham's attempt at *post-mortem* distinction was by no means as successful as he could have desired. He wished to bequeath his whole body to posterity. He had the amazing assurance to assume that it might be usefully introduced at philosophical banquets after the fashion of the celebrated Egyptian skeleton. With merciless effrontery he would have deprived the guests of their appetites, and saddened their mirth by the ghastly presence of a corpse at the head of the table. Accordingly, he directed that his body should be scientifically preserved. But even his disciples and admirers did not appreciate his dead companionship as he expected, and probably most of them soon wished that he had been deposited in the usual fashion in the tomb. At length poor Bentham found his way to University College, London, where his chief office appears to have been to serve as a grim laughing-stock for the students. The vanity of a man who could believe that his pickled presence could be acceptable to future generations, even in their gleesome gatherings, must have been unbounded.



CHAPTER XX.

THE GREAT POST-MORTEM.

BUT once dead, buried, and epitaphed, what of the Great Hereafter? For the departed one the true life has only just commenced when he crosses the mysterious threshold of Time. Who durst venture to write a chapter on the author in Eternity?

Surely if we might expect any class of mortals to be interested in upholding the doctrine of immortality, it is the men who by their gifts are constituted the instructors, and by their office the torch-bearers, of the human race. These, least of all, last of all, should be willing to believe that at death the body becomes a hopeless clod, and the soul a nameless nonentity. These least of all, last of all, should give the lie to that longing for Fame which has been one of the great prompting principles of their lives, and which has sustained them in their toils, even when flesh failed and spirit faltered. Possessing minds specially illuminated, and tongues touched with live coals from the great Altar of Creation, it is their duty to head the multitude in its mystic march, and light us on to a better land. But what shall we say if we find men with Heaven's patent of nobility in their hands, voluntarily enrolling themselves under the black flag of Annihilation, joining the dismal procession of sceptics and guiding their fellows to the region of Oblivion, or, worse

still, to the place where darkness dwells for ever? Can greater contradiction well be imagined than the thousand aspirations of genius on the one hand, all soaring beyond the little limits of the Present; and on the other, the paralysing belief that beyond the grave there is naught but a hideous blank! 'I will have nothing to do with your immortality,' wrote Byron in 1811; 'if men are to live, why die at all?' 'I don't know whether you have got a soul or not,' said Fuseli sturdily, 'but I know I have.'

It becomes us, however, to speak sparingly on this momentous matter. It is with a man's writings we are now concerned. What view will he take of them when he turns over their pages in the future? What shall be said for him when the great *post-mortem* is held?

Rousseau's account of his intended appearance at the great Day of Assize is a miracle of vanity and audacity. When the trumpet of judgment shall sound he will present himself before the Universal Sovereign with his *Confessions* in his hand. He will address the Great Being in a confident voice, and say, 'See here what I have done, what I have thought, what I have been! I have uttered what was good and what was evil with equal freedom. I have shown myself such as I was, contemptible and vile, when I have been such: good, generous, and sublime, when that was the case. I have unveiled my inner man such as it has appeared to thee, O Eternal Being. Assemble around me the miserable crowd of my fellow-creatures; let them hear my confessions, groan over my indignities, and blush for my miseries. Let each of them in turn lay bare his heart at the foot of thy throne with the same sincerity, and then let a single soul of them tell thee if he dare, "*I was better than that man.*"' This passage may well stand unrivalled in human literature. It is perhaps the most colossal display of conceit and presumption ever put

in print. It seems incredible that any mortal could imagine that in the eyes of the Creator Right and Wrong were comparative questions, and that the great assize was a simple inquiry whether one man's soul was better or worse than another! Not even the stupidest culprit brought into court would have the effrontery to excuse himself by pleading that other sinners had stolen more purses than he had done; still less would he claim acquittal and approval because he frankly confessed the evil that had been in him.

Frightfully ridiculous is the idea of this same Jean Jacques marching into the Hall of Doom with a copy of his book in his hand, and confidently putting it in evidence as a complete answer to the delinquencies which the Recording Angel had registered, and which now stood to his charge in an indictment of innumerable counts. None but a Frenchman, in fact, could well have penned such a paragraph, and he only in anticipation of a Frenchman's Day of Judgment.

But whatever may be the destiny or the duration of the Soul, its published records cannot be carried away from earth: they must remain here, either for good or for ill. In the Egyptian mythology the spirits of the departed were conducted to the Hall of Osiris, and tried before that Deity, with his forty-two avengers ranged in double row; their good deeds being weighed in a balance which could not lie, and the result registered with an unerring pen by the clerk of the dread assize. There are scales of far finer fabrication in which every writer's works are tested at his decease, and either condemned inexorably or finally stamped with a divine *imprimatur* and an everlasting *cum privilegio*. Who can doubt how the beam, resting on its diamond bearings, and turning with the weight of a comma, would move when such productions as Butler's

Analogy or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* were tried, or, on the other hand, how angrily it would bound upwards when Voltaire's *La Pucelle* or Byron's *Don Juan* was submitted to the proof? In that court of criticism a reputation laboriously acquired on earth may vanish in an instant.

When Burns's remains were transferred from the northerly part of St. Michael's churchyard at Dumfries to the Mausoleum at the south-east side, the coffin was unavoidably laid open, and there the great poet was found lying as if he had just sunk into a dreamless sleep, the body appearing entire, the head covered with hair, the teeth white and firm in their sockets, the brow arched and unshrunken. He might have been interred twenty hours only instead of twenty years. But the vision lasted only for a few moments, for on attempting to move the coffin, the head 'parted from the trunk, and the whole body, with the exception of the bones, crumbled into dust.'

Just so is it in a metaphorical sense with many a proud reputation when it is laid bare to the searching light of the true sun, and brought into the all-dissolving atmosphere of eternity. There may be nothing left but a handful of dust. Even whilst living it has often become a serious question for an author, notwithstanding all the admiration which the world may have lavished upon him, whether he has employed his rare gifts for good purposes or for evil; whether his genius has expended itself in bright but profitless flashes; whether his pen has been used in adorning vice and gilding corruption; or, on the other hand, whether he has spent his strength in developing noble thoughts which have kindled other minds, and thereby helped to raise the moral temperature and refine the moral atmosphere of the globe.

Many a renowned writer has expressed deep regret when

reviewing his compositions in the waning light of life, or in the ruddy glow which bespeaks the coming of the eternal morn. Boccaccio, whose *Decameron* was once amongst the most popular of productions, lived to deplore its profligate tone, and, when writing to a nobleman, earnestly entreated him never to allow it to be read by the females of his family. Lope de Vega was smitten with compunction even whilst in full career, believing that he was misapplying his talents, and afterwards devoted himself to sacred dramas and works of a graver description. Under a similar conviction Racine resolved to compose no more tragedies, tender as they were, and wished to become a solitary; but his confessor advised him to marry, apparently as a penitential proceeding, for his wife must have been rather of an ascetic turn herself, since she never honoured her husband by reading his productions.

Whilst on his deathbed, the Russian Gogol wrote some lines condemning his works as the 'offspring of a miserable vanity,' and expressing a desire that they might all be speedily forgotten. This wish he practically confirmed by burning the conclusion of the *Dead Souls*, the story to which his fame is mainly due. A morbid man was Gogol, it is true, but many a stronger intellect has quaked at the dread hour of reckoning, when considering what equivocal things had been conjured up by a profligate pen, but must now be left to walk the world long after the author himself had disappeared. At the close of Chaucer's life, says Anthony Wood, he reproached himself severely for the licentious portions of his writings. 'Woe! woe! is me that I cannot recall and annul those things; but alas! they are now continued from man to man, and I cannot do what I would desire!' 'So heartily,' said Rogers, 'has Moore repented of having written the poems by "Thomas Little," that

I have seen him shed tears, tears of deep contrition, when we were talking of them.' More than one author indeed has spent a large portion of his later years in uprooting the tares and poisonous things he had been at such pains to plant. Weary, remorseful work it has been for those unhappy toilers who, when the shadows of life's evening were falling heavily, might be seen struggling in frantic haste to pull down the structures they were once so eager to erect.

But if a writer can suffer such bitter regrets in this life, what a maddening thought must it be in a future state, where all that is evil will assume such an infinitely more loathsome form, that he must leave behind him some accursed thing to serve as an infamous monument to his memory! If, as we hopefully assume, nay, charitably believe, that the spirit, purified by sincere repentance, finds its way to a nobler sphere, how will it then deal with the awful conviction that there remains in the world an evil force of its own production which must continue to pollute and debase generation after generation until its virus is slowly exhausted? Would not our great libraries shrink terribly in their dimensions if each author on examining his works by the piercing light of the Future could cancel what he now condemns, or could issue a purified edition from a celestial press?

Verily if the pen be not guided by morality; still more if it be brandished against truth or virtue, the mischief it may accomplish is mischief which ages may not suffice to correct. The contents of a single inkstand may flood a whole kingdom with vice or deluge it with blood. A bunch of unprincipled quills may make more havoc than a forest of bayonets, and a few volumes may plough up a whole community more fearfully than a horde of hostile invaders.

The very fate of Europe has probably been altered by the

influence of Voltaire and Rousseau, and even at the present day the uneasy movement of the masses on the Continent may perhaps be attributed in no small degree to the throes and heavings, as it were, of those buried Titans.

Truly if, as was said by Ben Jonson—himself not the highest type of the character he commended—'poets must be good men,' ought not all the endowed intellects of the earth to regard this as the most essential of their obligations? It is the tribute they should pay for their privilege. Their faculties are not their own. They hold them in trust for the race. Their commission as Nature's priests runs upon the apostolical lines, and if they do not possess the supernatural gifts of old, yet to them has been granted the power of working the miracles of mind.

On the other hand, if the Literary Workman has done his duty well and faithfully, and dying should leave behind him no single sentence which he would fain expunge from his books, is he not entitled to a loving place in human memory?

Nobly spoke Thomas Campbell when he said, 'I believe that when I am gone justice will be done to me in this way—that I was a pure writer. It is an inexpressible comfort at my time of life to be able to look back and feel that I have not written one line against religion or virtue.' Similarly spoke Wordsworth in his ebbing years: 'Whatever the world may think of me or my poetry is *now* of little consequence, but one thing is a comfort in my old age, that none of my works written since the days of my early youth contain a line I wish to blot out because it panders to the baser passions of our nature.'

To the same purpose, but still more emphatic if possible, was Sir Walter's testimony, for he, as he said, had been perhaps the most voluminous author of his day: 'It is a comfort to me to think that I have tried to unsettle no man's faith, to corrupt no

man's principles, and that I have written nothing which on my deathbed I would wish to blot.' Was there ever a prouder comment pronounced on a work than the well-known remark of the Abbé Terrasson—that if the happiness of the human race could have been secured by any single composition it would have been by Fénélon's *Telemachus*? Contrast it with the criticism passed upon another French production. Writing to Rousseau to thank him for his second discourse in praise of savage life, Voltaire observed with more honesty of expression perhaps than the stinging satire might suggest—'One longs, on reading your book, to walk on all-fours. But as I have lost that habit for more than sixty years, I feel unhappily the impossibility of resuming it;' and he concluded by inviting the author to come and 'drink the milk of his cows, and browse on his grass.' The aim of the one work was to lift men to the highest of human levels; of the other, to sink them into fellowship with the beasts that perish.

To all, however, who have been moved by pure and honourable motives—to all who have employed their genius wisely and worthily—we have incurred a debt of gratitude which it is but right should be constantly acknowledged. It is to these great workers that we owe, not merely the largest contributions which have been made to human knowledge, but the very funding, as it were, of human intelligence itself. It is they who have spoken for each age, and collected the living thoughts of each generation. Raised by their office to a loftier position than belongs to the rest of mankind, their eye has ranged over a larger sphere, and from this altitude it has been their business to detail to the listening masses below the spectacles which crowded on their sight, or the discoveries which they were enabled to make in the far-stretching regions of thought. Imagine a Milton standing

upon this eminence, and what is the vision which presents itself to his view? The very walls of creation seem to be thrown down, and the poetic sight wanders at will into the recesses of the universe. With swift but steady wings it sweeps over Chaos, soars to Paradise, plunges into Pandemonium, annihilating all Time, and in its magnificent audacity daring to chronicle the wars of Heaven and the adventures of Eternity. This is he who, as Gray grandly says—

> 'Rode sublime on the Seraph wings of ecstasy
> The secret of the abyss to espy.'

There comes another man of sorrowful countenance, with a heart furrowed by a thousand woes, and in him you see one of the most extraordinary explorers of the territories of Imagination the world has ever produced. He tells how he passed the dolorous gates, through which hope could never force her way; was ferried over the fiery lake; trod the nine circles of the Inferno, *tutti i cerchi del regno dolente;* shrank aghast from their terrific spectacles or quailed under their tempestuous cries, and then informs us how the unwearied Muse, emerging from this realm of horrors, toiled through the tedious zones of the mount of Purgatory, pursuing her way into the happier spheres of Paradise, until she had traversed the whole breadth of the Spiritual World, as it lay mapped out before the poet's eyes—all the incidents of this fearful journey being detailed with as much graphic minuteness as if he had been travelling on the most solid soil. Look, too, at Bacon, the great interpreter of Nature, as he enters the court of Philosophy, over which he seems to preside as judge, and seating himself in lordly state summons one phenomenon after another to give evidence on any doubtful question; examines and cross-examines every fact which he can call before him; and, after comparing the testimony of these mute but

meaning witnesses, delivers his judgment, if not with permanent certainty, yet with a conscientious industry which contrasted finely with the random verdicts and reckless assumptions of most previous inquirers.

And, again, listen whilst Shakespeare, casting his sunlit glances over the whole expanse of society, piercing human breasts as few have ever done before, tells us now of the wild conflicts in which passion is pitted against passion, and the heart is shattered in the strife; or, again, of the gentler contest between rival emotions, where the fight is in itself a delicious flutter, and only imparts an additional zest to life. Now we see him unlocking the soul of crime, and revealing the doubts and agonies which accompany sin, as if he were the official anatomist of vice; and then hurrying us away in sport to a country, peopled, it may be, with fairy forms, which seem to be the spirits of flowers clad in vestments woven from sunbeams—places where the ruggedness of life dissolves in poetic beauty, and its discords melt softly into music; where the landscape appears to be covered with a perennial green, and we fancy ourselves to be the inhabitants of unfading woods, sporting beneath unclouded skies, and revelling in an everlasting spring.

We have but to imagine what fearful gaps would have been opened in the history of humanity by the annihilation of some of these intellectual labourers. Say, for instance, that Aristotle —that isthmus between ancient and modern learning, whose writings served like a causeway across the barbarous ages to connect the old continent of Philosophy and the new—say that he had been suppressed, and his place left unsupplied, would the hour-hand of civilisation have stood where it now does? Say that that ancient well of Poetry, which was dug by Homer (or those whose names he represents), to which thousands have

repaired from almost every age and every land, had never been laid open to the public eye, what a source of delight would have been left unsealed! Blot out Robert Burns, for instance, from the scroll of the past, and who can tell what a vacuum this would surely create in the hearts of the Scottish peasantry. Silence for ever the harmonies of Handel; say that no man shall ever again listen to that magnificent torrent of sound, the *Hallelujah Chorus*, which might have been composed for an orchestra of Morning Stars:—never again hear that plaintive strain *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, which seems to consist of sighs set to music, rising and falling as if the soul were singing to sleep the dust from which it had just separated; now soaring as if anxious to be gone, and then returning as if to hush the parted clay to rest, with the hope that together they should one day see God! Suppress these, extinguish a few of the innumerable poems, philosophies, dramas, melodies which might be mentioned, and it would be to tear out some of the choicest strings from the harp of Genius, and to mangle the instrument which has done so much to soothe the sorrows and enhance the pleasures of man.

Whether the children of Genius then have aided in building the temple of truth, or in adorning its walls with rich paintings, or in supplying it with sweet music, or in ministering at its high altars, or in scattering gems and roses in the path of posterity, they have left us an heritage of mental delight, which, after all deductions are made, is one of the brightest features in the history of our race.

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